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WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG BAD WORDS?

*Censored soon
on the Chinese Web*

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L'INSOMNIAQUE

HSI Hsuan-wou & Charles REEVE

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POLONIUS: ...What do you read, my lord?

HAMLET: Words, words, words.

POLONIUS: What is the matter, my lord?...

*HAMLET: Slanders, sir: for the satirical rogue says here
that old men have grey beards, that their faces are
wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and
plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack
of wit, together with most weak hams: all which, sir,
though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet
I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down...*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Hamlet, Act II, Scene II

INTRODUCTION

*The truths that we refuse to hear
always end up unclogging our ears.*

TAOIST PROVERB

Any internet user in China surfing the Web for news about the unrest in Tunisia or Egypt will invariably see posted on his or her screen this dry and frosty message from the authorities: “Under current law, your search cannot be completed.” For the Middle Kingdom is also a “Constitutional State” whose laws and regulations aim primarily at preserving the social order that the ruling class imposes on the “workshop of the world.”

It is common knowledge that words like “Tiananmen,” “Tibet,” and “human rights” have been banished from the Web in recent years—even though the “Great Firewall” has never prevented resourceful Internauts from gleaning information via backdoor routes.

As might be expected, in early 2011, the words “Tunisia,” “Egypt,” and “Libya” were in turn censored. More surprisingly, the Party hierarchy in charge of “communication”—once called “propaganda”—took another, even nuttier measure, when it banned the word “jasmine” from the intertubes. Has there ever been a more ludicrous bureaucratic decision? Can the Chinese ruling class be led by a clique so simple-minded as to believe that blanking out pernicious words would prevent the outbreak of social unrest?

Their censorship reflects the state of panic that seizes the bureaucracy’s officials when confronted with faraway popular movements powerful enough to get rid of kleptocratic tyrants, who bear more than a passing resemblance to the collective dictatorship of China’s top dignitaries, likewise famed for their nepotism and rampant corruption.

The troubles, which culminated in Ben Ali’s precipitous flight and Mubarak’s soon thereafter, caused the Chinese leadership to react with massive mobilization of repressive forces (increasing the already bloated budget), preventive arrests of numerous dissidents,

and even tighter surveillance of internet users and bloggers, while at the same time reiterating *ad nauseam* its promise to soften the conditions of exploitation, framed as a virtuous appeal to promote the “happiness of the people.”

Besides indicating possible conflicts among the regime’s various factions, these two contradictory approaches illustrate the extreme nervousness of the entire bureaucracy in the face of potential contagion from freedom struggles in distant Arab countries. This is the classic use of the carrot and the stick as a method of governing. The soy sauce oligarchy, aware of the hatred it arouses among the majority of the population, is afraid it could lose its vast privileges and its place at the top of the social pyramid should proletarians suddenly rediscover a taste for liberty.

No longer sure which Leninist or Confucian saints to worship, the neo-Maoist episcopate has no other recourse but to rely on the efficiency of its countless cops and on the semantic manipulations of its Thought Police. But in a country under the yoke and omertà of a Stalinist party that reeks of the mafia, word censorship is more than just a paranoid, ideological measure to bolster the great lie; it is a police measure mobilizing hundreds of thousands of cops to tap into, read, and censor comments perceived as threats, and then to put on file, control, intimidate, arrest, beat up, torture, imprison, or wipe out all trace of anyone they consider dangerous.

In China, tracking down threatening words is an essential ingredient in the vast, unrelenting manhunt called “harmony.” In the ironic jargon of the Chinese Internauts, “to harmonize” is a synonym for the repressive measures taken against Internet troublemakers and for the activity of the censors entrusted with managing the *representation* of reality—given their inability to fix reality itself.

Maintaining an improbable “social harmony”—a hackneyed Confucianism used to justify and secure the red bourgeoisie’s domination—is a precarious balancing act in the current

situation, rife with class conflicts of all sorts. Recently, intransigent strikes, stormy street demonstrations, massive outbreaks of civil disobedience, and lately, violent riots put down by armored cars have exacerbated the periodic “mass incidents”.¹

Although these events typically remain localized, news about them gets relayed across the entire country thanks to modern communication—cell phones and the Internet. Social inequality, the Party’s omnipotence, the corruption and arrogance of the ruling class and its flunkies, marketplace and state terrorism—against the environment and humans alike—all provoke rebellious feelings among growing numbers of Chinese, especially among the lower classes who fully realize that they are the fall guys of “market socialism.”

At times this anger boils over and turns into explicit rejection. While guarded language is generally used for fear of the police, mounting exasperation occasionally unleashes direct, revolutionary denunciation of the State, its depravity and indiscretions, and even of the founding fathers themselves. More and more, these criticisms break free of post-Maoist newspeak² or turn this jargon, deliberately designed to cater to the covert interests of the regime’s dignitaries, against its initiators.

Alongside these “disharmonies,” a new phenomenon has developed: the increasingly precarious existence of “educated” urban youth, often living on the edge of poverty. These young people are among the most receptive to the anti-totalitarian revolutions, no matter how far away. They are the ones who respond to calls for action launched over the Internet, and they are the prime targets of the repressive measures imposed on the worldwide web by Chinese authorities.

Not only have attitudes changed, but the situation has reversed. Until quite recently, today’s youth, by its very passivity, was one of the pillars of the regime. Confident in the promises disseminated in propaganda, young people looked forward to a “radiant future”

¹ A term in the official jargon meaning any act of collective disobedience. An estimated 90,000 such “mass incidents” occurred in 2009.

² See the appendix for one example, a leaflet written and handed out by a group of “petitioners” in Peking.

issuing from red capitalism's double-digit growth. Unfortunately, the development of present-day capitalism, whether red, pink, or gray, inexorably gives rise to a host of passably educated, young city-dwellers who aspire to jobs and pay commensurate with the financial sacrifices their parents made. But in China as elsewhere, their fast-growing ranks doom them to precarious livelihoods and, for some, to marginality.

In 2009, novelist Yu Hua described the balance in society in this way: "The social contradictions and problems that kept spreading like weeds in the interval [of some 30 years] were buried under optimism fueled by the lightning speed of economic growth." Since then, optimism has waned and the lightning speed has slowed, while weeds continue to invade the entire edifice. Overtaken by disillusionment as well, the children of market socialism are awakening to the idea that the regime must be "democratized." Of course, their opinions differ over the desirable nature of this more or less idealized transformation, which they vaguely imagine as the only possible way out of the impasse of their lives.

The official line is that the Chinese are not yet "mature" enough for democracy (whether Western-style or a more vernacular type) and, allegedly, do not even want it; "liberty," itself, is tirelessly presented as a notion foreign to this multi-millennial culture in which paternalistic authoritarianism alone can assure rising prosperity. Formerly assimilated and peddled by fairly educated young people, the argument is about to backfire: much of the population and its youth now see the immutable post-Maoist regime as the main stumbling block to real social progress.

Indeed, were social justice and freedom of speech to emerge concurrently, the red oligarchy, which monopolizes the "fruits" of growth and brutally imposes its hollow sophisms in order to mask its insatiable will for power, would collapse. The model adopted and perpetuated by the regime after the successive failures of Maoism—a model coupling a hyper-authoritarian police state to accelerated, ultra-liberal economic growth—has actually widened the inequality gap. It has worsened the population's living conditions and helped enrich the red bourgeoisie and its progeny. This contradiction has

worn threadbare the propaganda about harmonious development guided by an iron fist—pursuit of happiness under firm rule—to the point that it is now unintelligible.

Since nothing stays secret for long in cyberspace, a few clicks brought us to an official Chinese document, as confidential as it was enlightening. Purportedly drawn up by the Internet police—the Bureau of Keyword Harmony, it is a list of words to be censored on the Internet as soon as the first rumblings of a much-feared revolt are heard. We present here a few extracts from this long inventory of words that the powerful find so frightening, with the Chinese characters transliterated into pinyin and arranged in alphabetical order. Below the cybercops' cynical reasons, we have taken the opportunity to add our own commentary in the belief that through the thickest fog light can shine.

罷工 [bagong] Strike

Any strike is sabotage to the Chinese economy and an attack on the Party that so gloriously raised profitability to new heights. Furthermore, our responsibility to our foreign corporate friends dictates that we guarantee strict enforcement of labor regulations, a key factor in their decision to invest in our country. Any mention of the word “strike” is therefore criminal and unpatriotic in essence and must be absolutely prohibited. Whatever the case, while we cannot totally prevent strikes, even though we employ every means at our disposal, the more factory strikes there are, the less we will tolerate any talk of them.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

When men stop working, words find other employment

Raoul VANEIGEM

In China, where strikes are prohibited and the official labor union is the only organization supposed to represent workers' interests, any strike movement is by definition autonomous and unauthorized.

The insidious or brutal exercise of power does not prevent increasingly pervasive discontent, which augurs far-reaching social transformations. Strikes, previously impossible, have become everyday occurrences. Angry protesters occupy their places of work, burn state administrative offices, demonstrate in the streets, and confront the police. Petitioners in ever greater numbers leave their remote provinces for Beijing to register their complaints at the State Bureau of Letters and Calls (hereafter the Petitions Office) and camp nearby for months on end waiting for their petitions to be reviewed. Faced with this rising protest, the regime chooses to employ either the carrot or the stick: the stick on relatively isolated protesters not seen as a threat, the carrot on movements sizeable enough to get out of control.

This was evident in 2010, when authorities negotiated with strikers, most notably at Foxconn and Honda, and the bosses finally conceded significant wage increases. Without underrating the workers' determination or minimizing their victory, it is worth noting that these two companies were owned by foreign capitalists—Taiwanese for Foxconn, Japanese for Honda—which the Chinese government no doubt pressured with some satisfaction while pandering to popular chauvinism.

Today, the communist regime and private capitalists ("red" themselves or close to the Party) can resort to means other than direct repression to wipe out "victories" gained through collective action. In the case of piece rate wages, one option is to speed up production. As a striking worker in Dongguan, Guangdong province explained:

The company complied with the higher minimum wage, but at the same time raised our daily output. Before, we had to make 6000 pieces in 8 hours to earn our base wage. Now, we are obliged to turn out 9000 pieces in the same length of time. With the pay increasing from 770 to 920 yuan per month [from \$121 to \$144], the minimum wage has risen only 19% while our workload has increased 50%. And you want the workers to rejoice?

Capitalists can also raise productivity by introducing more machinery and computerized operations to modernize production. Finally, high inflation has gnawed away at the workers' purchasing power since 2010. In March 2011, the year-on-year rate of inflation topped 5% and food prices soared 12%.

At the outset of 2011, articles in the Western press foresaw the likelihood of a "workers' spring." The upsurge in wildcat strikes throughout 2010 nourished the hope, or fear, among some China experts in the West that such "social tensions" might signal the eruption of widespread conflict and maybe even the eve of revolution in the Middle Kingdom. Such a movement could in fact develop, but we should not forget a lesson to be drawn from recent revolutions in Arab countries: while we should be more than ever aware of the blindness of "experts" to the deep-seated changes at work in these societies, we should be equally wary of their ability to predict the outcomes of social movements that they overstate in advance.

How situations will evolve cannot be predicted merely on the basis of sociological observations, nor does history unfold according to a process of "cut-and-paste," even though events elsewhere often do have an impact on the dynamics of social movements. The existence of conditions conducive to an outbreak of revolt in no way means that one will actually occur.

A wildcat strike is wild precisely because it is neither foreseen nor announced, and whether or not it will spread is just as unpredictable. In that connection, Chinese workers hold other surprises in store, not only for their masters, but also for Western "specialists"—high-level economic advisers or "investor" consultants—on the Chinese economy. And they will inevitably surprise us as well, we who warmly wish them every success in their struggles for dignity and fairness. The unmistakable message of the strikes and other "mass incidents," which we can interpret as a form of poetic justice, is that class struggle is the principal menace looming over a regime that still claims to be "communist." Through their emphatically uncompromising actions, the infuriated workers are shattering many a myth and spoiling the new clothes of the Maoist cadres-cum-capitalist managers. Tired of nibbling on crumbs from the capitalist banquet, the poor are demanding their share of the bounty, and the size of their appetite will assuredly affect our lives.

報復 [baofu] Vengeance

The most dangerous emotion that can spread among the people is the longing for social vengeance. In our country's history, the Taiping Uprising and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution—to cite just two of the bloodier examples—demonstrate to what levels of ferocity the poor and the embittered can reach when a sense of duty no longer keeps them obedient. Since our compatriots often behave themselves like overgrown children, it is the Party's responsibility as their guiding father to control the unruliness of some of them. Thanks to our wise administration, simply the fear generated by constant calls to order (sometime preemptively) suffices to effectively thwart the reprehensible schemes of troublemakers and deviants. But when trouble does spread, desires for vengeance may coalesce and fortify the poor's determination, which turns dangerously criminal when they feel they can do anything they want. This is why any allusion to vengeance in our harmonious society must be outlawed. As in every civilized country, armed force is the exclusive prerogative of the State. Law must therefore prevail in order to defend the population's interests, which, in any case, cannot be different from those of the State itself.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

*Vengeance does not right a wrong,
but it does prevent a hundred others.*

ARAB PROVERB

On 23 May 1989, at the height of Beijing Spring while students were erecting “the goddess of democracy” statue, three rebellious youths Lu Decheng, Yu Zhijian, and Yu Dongyue defaced with red paint the portrait of the Great Helmsman displayed in Tiananmen Square. Arrested by the security guards of the pro-democracy students—who were still under the illusion that their actions could pressure the government to reform—the three young men were turned over to the police. A few weeks later, the army

massacred people gathered in and around the Square, and the three unlucky students were condemned to long prison terms and disappeared forever into the camps.

Eighteen years later on 12 May 2007, Gu Hai'ou, an unemployment man, aged 35, was arrested for trying to set the same portrait on fire. He also disappeared into the grinding cogs of the police machinery.

The case of Yang Jia was different. Arrested in Shanghai in 2008 on a petty offence (the theft of a bike), this young man was physically abused in a police station. Several times he returned to the station to get an apology from the police, but always in vain. Finally in July 2008, he returned to the station with a gun and shot and killed six police. Found guilty, he was executed later that year in November. Contrary to the earlier cases, this time the Yang Jia incident received nationwide attention. From then on, his name has been on the long list of “newsworthy heroes”: ordinary people who decided to take justice into their own hands when faced with the impunity of mercenaries and government officials. Yang Jia has become an icon. People shout out his name in demonstrations and in confrontations with repressive forces. At his trial, Yang Jia had counterattacked by declaring,

It's because of you [the judges] that the police dared to act that way [to beat me] and that I, a citizen who has respected the laws throughout his twenty-eight years of life, am reduced to standing in the dock today.

This event is exemplary of the hatred that has built up against the regime today, equally as strong as the common people's sympathy for Yang Jia.

The importance Yang Jia's case has acquired also demonstrates how much the use of new technology has transformed the dissemination of news and permitted those from below to spread news of repression and resistance throughout the entire society. As soon as Yang Jia was found guilty, a petition appeared on the Internet demanding amnesty for him and abolition of the death penalty; it gathered more than 3000 signatures. For a population living under constant police surveillance and threatened with deportation for the smallest infraction and the least political “deviance,” this number is not something to laugh at.

The notion of popular vengeance continues to take root and spread throughout society. Undoubtedly this is one of the features of modern China, the people's answer to the "harmonious society" imagined by those from above. The very widespread desire for vengeance shows how much the regime is perceived to be repressive and totalitarian in its nature. The majority of the people, whether they lean towards resignation or towards rebellion, expect no justice at all and know full well that the justice system is just one of the repressive arms of the dictatorship.

In short, the time of illusions seems past. Tiananmen happened long ago and the "goddess of democracy" has turned to dust. Added to the abuses of power that constitute a police State is a history of social injustice woven from a thousand large and small inequities that daily grows worse and stokes the common people's increasingly outspoken anger. The Chinese will not easily let themselves be misled a second time by siren calls for a possible reform of the red bureaucracy.

暴動 [baodong] Riot

Who is more criminal than a rioter? The mad dogs who dare to use violence to give free rein to their discontent or to intimidate their bosses deserve a thousand deaths. Let Harmony's truncheons beat them unmercifully about their envy-filled heads, and preserve us from their barbarous fury! To prevent any desire to riot, let us hide this seductive word so no one can read it—alas! we well know that all poor people are potential rioters.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

*And remember, comrades, that a single Molotov cocktail can set
the entire Special Economic Zone on fire...*

DENG XIAOPING, on his deathbed

At daybreak on June 12, 2011, a couple of street vendors who had set up their stall in front of a supermarket in Dadun—a neighborhood in the borough of Xintang, located in the municipality of Zengcheng, adjacent to Canton—in order to peddle blue jeans, were beaten up by urban guards for having refused to pay the few yuan these predators demanded as their “protection” price. Like so many of this region’s migrants, this couple was from Sichuan and was habitually targeted by these widely hated Cantonese henchmen. As tempers flared, other Sichuanese came to the rescue and joined the fray; soon it became a riot that lasted for over three nights. The Party committee headquarters and the police station were burned, and the authorities had to call in armed police as well as special police aboard brand new armored cars equipped for crowd control.

This is one example of the fairly serious revolts that have shaken China over the last several years. By its size and violence, it signals just how exasperated the *mingong*³ have become. It is definitely an example of what threatens to occur with more frequency in the migrant worker zones: fed up with being exploited, disdained, and mistreated, migrant

³ Migrant workers from the countryside, see entry for “Migrant”.

workers now through their strength of numbers are no longer afraid to rebel and stand up to the police. Nevertheless, it shows the limitations and contradictions of these spontaneous and isolated movements in a society where capitalist development depends on the preservation of rigid separations among the workers.

The perpetuation of the *hukou*⁴ system marginalizes the *mingong* vis-à-vis the local population and weakens them by confining them to their own community. As the poorest of the poor, already exploited in the factories of the “workshop of the world,” the migrants are also a source of considerable revenue for the many residents of the zones where they work. In addition to income from collective land rented to companies, the rentals of shoddy migrant housing and various scams also bring in large and small profits made off the migrants’ backs.

The defense of such economic interests often goes hand in hand with xenophobic attitudes. In Chaozhou, in the north of Guangdong, where some migrants (again from Sichuan) rioted at the end of May 2011 in support of a fellow migrant who was beaten by his boss,⁵ groups of native residents pillaged migrant barracks in the name of “defending our country.” For the moment, however, hatred towards the communist power remains a stronger force and often unites rebels, *mingong*, and native residents against the forces of repression. But it’s quite possible that in the long run powerful circles won’t hesitate to profit from these divisions in order to prevent rebellions from unifying and growing. As is the case elsewhere, official propaganda will present rebellions by the super-exploited proletarians as riots by “marginalized” paupers, by dangerous “outside” elements.

Nevertheless, news of the Dadun revolt—like that of Chaozhou before—spread over the Internet and immediately sparked the enthusiasm of many Internauts, who responded with the cry of “*geili!*”(too cool!). The cyber police then got busy as usual to deprive the search engines of access to three key words that allowed the Internauts to learn more about these events: the place names of Dadun, Xintang and Zengcheng.

⁴ Certificate of residence.

⁵ See “A riot that could easily have been avoided—a report from Chaozhou,” *China Labour Bulletin*, 20 July 2011.

We can't help but comment here on one of the many ironies that history abounds in. As everyone knows, the torments and then self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, the street vendor in Sidi Bouzid, set off the uprising in Tunisia known as the "Jasmine Revolution," which was soon imitated in Egypt. In this regard, the Chinese cybercops, who had erased the key words "Tunisia" and "jasmine" from search engines in order to avoid any contagion from the revolt, seemed as disconnected from reality as any geek hooked on video games.

Having wandered around in "virtual" space for so long, cyber-censors have forgotten that the same causes tend to product the same effects, however much they are misrepresented. They seem to be unaware that reality always prevails over denial and that its impact on the course of events is like the sweeping away of so many pious lies, however elaborate and absurd they may be. To paraphrase the industrialist Friedrich Engels: what our comrades the cops lack, though it must have been drilled into their heads in the Party schools, is the dialectic: "Here they see only the cause, over there only the effect," and they rely on symbols to interpret the world, just as they rely on intimidation to rule over it.

博客 [boke] Blog

In case of widening social unrest and before deciding upon the suspension of all Internet access—which we have the means to do at whatever the economic cost—we must consider indiscriminately wiping out all sources of thought and thereby preventing any point of view—except the State’s—from expressing itself on the Internet. We will then have to switch from an insidious form of curfew to actual martial law. By erasing everything down to the key word “blog” from the search engines, we will then leave a clean slate for Party communications, and the country will speak in a single, necessarily harmonious voice, until reason returns to those led astray. Only commerce and wise Party maxims will have a voice. The Internet is a marvelous instrument when wise leaders know how to handle it for enlightening the masses and maintaining their obedience.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

–BUREAU FOR KEYWORD HARMONY

Prisons are built with the stones of Law, computers with the steel of War.

Billy BLAKE, JR.

In China as elsewhere over the last few years, the Internet has played an important role in the spread of information. With every contestation (strike, occupation, demonstration), hundreds of photos and messages circulate on the Web from one end of the country to the other, and by indirect routes feed into the worldwide media. In China there are about four hundred million Internet users, half of whom are bloggers. This doesn’t mean that all of them are critics of the government. Many of them are happy with just recreational use. Others are paid by the regime to counter conflicting views and spread acceptable news. But a significant minority now uses the Web to break through the great wall of lies that shields the regime.

It seems that the Internet will play a major role in the next great struggles to shake China. The authorities have well understood this danger and have implemented a powerful

system of information control. An estimated 40,000 cybercops watch over everything that circulates on the Net before filtering or blocking words deemed dangerous, or, indeed, arresting dissident Internet users. The authorities plan to put in place a permanent surveillance system that will locate at any moment any of the seventeen million mobile phone users in the Beijing municipality alone. If dissident movements, which have sporadically broken out here and there increasingly over the last decade and a half, ever become coordinated enough to endanger the central government, mastery of the digital communications system will become as crucial for the regime's opponents as for its defenders.

We know that on Thursday, February 17, 2011, an unknown blogger, inspired by the Tunisian events, launched the call for a "Jasmine Revolution" on Boxun (a Chinese language American site) as an imaginative way to demand the democratization of the regime. He invited his comrades to go stroll around various well-known public places (such as McDonalds or Kentucky Fried Chicken) in a dozen Chinese cities on Sunday, February 20th at 2PM. The following Sunday (February 27th), the same call to gather reached around twenty cities. The third Sunday (March 6th) the same call went out again. Beijing quickly viewed these gatherings, despite their peacefulness, as grave threats to its power and made haste to send in hordes of police against these silent, gentle strollers. The police presence was so enormous and arrests so numerous that the call was not renewed for the following Sunday. Nevertheless, the idea of a "Jasmine Revolution" was launched, and the police "harmonized" the word "jasmine" on their search engines.

At the end of three nights of rioting by the Sichuanese migrant workers' in Dadun (June 10-13, 2011), we know that the keyword "Dadun" has also disappeared from the Chinese search engines (despite the French Press's almost total, complacent silence about these riots). In an ironic twist, the name of Fang Binxing, the scientist who had created the "golden shield," the official name for the control and filtering system of the Chinese Internet, has likewise disappeared from the list of searchable key words. This occurred after master censor Fang Binxing became the butt of a jeering campaign (culminating

when a shoe was thrown at his face during a conference—another imported gesture with an Arabic flourish).

The Internet, which is so indispensable to the functioning of a “modern” economy, is undoubtedly the technological innovation that most contributes to changing the attitudes of the Chinese public. The least demonstration, strike, or other public protest is photographed or filmed by mobiles, and the images captured in moments of tense confrontations instantly appear on the Web for all to see. Faced with the popular mania for this new mode of communication, the State has adopted an ambiguous position. On the one hand, it has created the most bloated computer police force in the world, equipped with the most advanced technology of the global, computer marketplace; on the other, the Party intervenes massively to make its voice heard on it by inciting its followers and henchmen to join blogs posing as typical citizens and systematically taking positions opposing those of the dissidents. The Chinese internauts have nicknamed them the “5 mao Party” (50 Cent Party).⁶

More than literature, newspapers, or songs, the Internet is the medium for freedom of expression that is absent everywhere else. Han Han, aged 28, a former car race driver, now a successful novelist, runs a blog in which he doesn’t hesitate to denounce with biting humor the injustices and scandals that have made the headlines. With 400 million visits in four years, his blog is the most frequently viewed in China and even worldwide. The fact that Han Han, who doesn’t spare the powerful, has never had trouble with the police and seems to be untouchable is often attributed to his great popularity. We don’t know what Han Han himself thinks about all this, but given his astuteness it is a strong bet that he anticipates an impromptu visit from the cops one day. Indeed, he has the obvious example of the internationally well-known artist Ai Weiwei (who took part in planning the Olympic stadium in Beijing). Ai, also presumed to be untouchable, was nevertheless arrested in April 2011 and held in secret for nearly three months before being released in exchange for agreeing to make no further public statements. Since the

⁶ The price is a reference to the amount these “honkers” or “red hackers” are paid for each of their remote-controlled comments. (5 mao [jiao] equals 1/2 yuan (50¢); the yuan used to be pegged to the US dollar but is now about \$0.16 as of early 2013.)

call for a Chinese “Jasmine Revolution” echoing the troubles that have shaken the Arab world, the leadership became so nervous that it felt compelled to crack down on the opposition to drive home the message that no one is immune from a brutal straightening out, a variety of physical abuses, a long stay in a filthy prison. There is no doubt that the persistent disobedience of artists and Internauts from all walks of life will incite the government to multiply these kinds of repressive actions and to refine its filtering of independent information.

There are blogs particularly oriented towards social issues, which investigate “mass incidents” and various conflicts. The cyber police regularly block many of these blogs. One of the best-known, receiving more than 30,000 visits a day, is Zuola’s; Zuola is the alias of Zhou Shunguang who moved to Shenzhen after having investigated the May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan and is the young son of a miner. More than social networks like Facebook—which enabled Tunisians and Egyptians in the streets to coordinate their activities, but also allowed the Syrian police to track their opponents—it is this explosion of blogs that creates a permanent debate and makes known, sometimes furtively or guilefully, the real changes underway in this society.

Although the “blogosphere” offers the regime the possibility of gaining detailed knowledge about the dangers menacing it and thus the best possibility of preventing them, it ends up becoming a danger in itself—a weapon in the hands of the people. To permanently block access to the Internet, even mobile phones, in order to prevent troubles from spreading or a political alternative from taking form through debate, would be tantamount to admitting the failure of the policy of modernization and the transition toward a market economy. It would oblige the Party to halt the process, at least temporarily, and to return to a Maoist type of austere, autarkic, military dictatorship. Instead, a new ruling requires all website creators and bloggers to register with State authorities under their real names. This allows the State to defend itself against accusations of curtailing freedom while exercising absolute control over what is published on the Web. Not satisfied with filtering search engines like Baidu—the most used in China—the authorities recently required that hundreds of censors be hired by

companies operating “social networks” and microblogs within Chinese territory—“social networks” like Renren, a sort of Chinese Facebook, and microblogs like Sina Weibo, a site similar to Twitter and the object of intense surveillance.

The highest levels of the bureaucracy have gotten rich in the race for profits fueled by China’s strong export economy. This kleptocracy will not easily agree to sacrifice its wealth and its financial power for its security. However, it will unhesitatingly use any force or ruse necessary, as it has always done, if backed into a corner by street actions or encircled by unrestrained speech. The reactions of this impenetrable caste when menaced—notably its internal cohesion and its capacity to redeploy if the great game of *weiqi*⁷ turns to its disadvantage—are extremely difficult to predict. In any case, we must not underestimate the role of the military-security apparatus inside an essentially police-based dictatorship, and still less that of paranoia, which historically has been at least as important as stupidity and greed.

⁷ Chinese name for the ancient board game, known in the West under the Japanese name Go, inseparable from strategic thinking for the Chinese, as it is for the Koreans and Japanese.

獨立工會 [duli gonghui] Independent Union

Just as a representative democracy, an independent union is a luxury that only Western capitalism can afford and must, indeed, encourage in order to preserve the social consensus that keeps any challenges at bay. The Chinese proletariat is not “mature” enough for major negotiations over salaries or working conditions, any more than for representative democracy, simply because Chinese employers cannot grant any real concessions without losing their competitive edge. We’ll rather have “collective bargaining by riot”, despite its obvious drawbacks. Indeed, wildcat strikes are nevertheless preferable to a type of working class organization that would *de facto* fill the void of organized political opposition. That is why, if strikes and riots spread, it will be necessary to quickly eliminate the phrase “independent union” from the list of words permitted on the Internet, where it is still tolerated for now only in order to maintain surveillance of subversive activities.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

*Capitalist power would not be complete
without the regulating force of the trade unions.*

Anton PANNEKOEK

Right from the Beijing Spring’s first demonstrations in April 1989, the students were warmly supported by the city’s people. When they occupied Tiananmen Square, they were joined by workers. Some one hundred workers formed the Beijing Workers’ Autonomous Union. Isolated and in the minority, with no connections in the CP, they organized informally as an independent force. For the first time since 1949, workers organized outside of the Party’s official union and encouraged workers from other regions to follow their example. Soon unions sprang up all over the country. The communist regime immediately recognized the danger, fearing especially a situation similar to Poland’s and the creation of a Solidarnosc type workers’ union. Similarly, most

pro-democracy students viewed the rise of this kind of activism, out of reach of their control, with scorn and apprehension.

At the end of May, the members of the new unions began to agitate outside the square, in the working-class neighborhoods. By early June, tens of thousands of workers were already proclaiming the unions. When the unions' activists called for a general strike, student leaders opposed it. Elitist at heart, they saw the workers as no more than a force they could employ to serve their own movement. Claiming the principle of free association (written into the Chinese Constitution), the unions tried in vain to gain legal recognition. More farsighted than the student leaders, the regime became increasingly nervous about the situation in the factories and sought to bolster the power of the sole official union, the ACFTU (All China Federation of Trade Unions). The June 4th massacre above all struck down workers and common people who supported the movement in the streets of Beijing, in the suburbs, and around Tiananmen Square. Most of the Unions' members found themselves at the forefront of the revolt and many fell under the bullets of the repressive forces. Some militants managed to hide and a few escaped to Hong Kong, where they continued their activism through the journal *China Labour Bulletin* and its corresponding website: www.clb.org.hk.

The creation of workers' unions was without doubt the first attempt since the Communist Party took power in China to found an independent organization on a large scale. They formed the embryo of the first "free union" affirming that the working class' interests differed fundamentally from those of the State as employer. Their rise confirmed the lack of credibility of the official propaganda, which presents the State as flowing directly from the power of the workers and peasants.

Under "market socialism," the Chinese working class has been completely transformed, or, rather, trussed up and handed over to super-exploitation. Largely composed of young, rural migrants available for exploitation, a new proletariat has grown up in the Special Economic Zones. In the great industrial centers, called "the workshop of the world," class struggle has resurfaced in new forms.

In an earlier period, because of the weakness of the workers and the strength of the repression, strikes and protests were sporadic and without any noticeable or lasting organization. In turn, the official union overtly played the role of supervising and policing the workers. The idea of an independent union never disappeared, but it could never really assert itself, and the rare militants who came up from the ranks invariably disappeared, swallowed up by the forced labor camps.

Often created by the Chinese diaspora, notably in Hong Kong, some NGOs came to fill this void and played a union role in carrying on support work for worker demands—all the while avoiding any mention of politics. In turn, exiled, dissident workers advocated entry into the official union, a tactic that seemed to them the easiest and least dangerous. This seemed especially so towards the start of the 21st century, when the rise of domestic capitalism and the birth of a private capitalist class linked to the Party created fissures in the highest levels of the bureaucracy. These political divergences and market competition made negotiations within companies seem plausible. But the top leadership controlled the official union, and the slightest stirring of any autonomy on the part of the local or regional union bureaucracies was strangled at birth. The regime launched campaigns to make the ACFTU look more creditable, especially to the *mingong*. But workers have a strong memory of the regime's brutality and continue to recognize this organization as an auxiliary of the police force and as a company union whose primary role is to control the workforce and break strikes.

The idea of a free union, like the old mole, continued its work underground before resurfacing in 2010 during the great strikes in the Special Economic Zones. Meanwhile, industrial production gradually went from a concentration of under-qualified and under-equipped labor to a labor productivity increasingly relying on mechanization, which changed the conditions of labor and its demands. New generations of workers, especially women workers, are better educated and have absorbed the experience of their elders. The *mingong* no longer consider a return to their villages as inevitable or even desirable; their current demands reflect new requirements and needs. We now see the birth of strike

or grievance committees where “leaders” act in the open. In the face of this development, the official union remains impervious to renewed worker activism, without trying to recuperate it, and it continues to play its traditional role of strikebreaker and informer. This situation reaffirms the persistent impossibility of strike committees and activist centers to make themselves into permanent organizations, embryos of an independent unionism with the means to oppose the official union.

The perfectly discredited official union is, in fact, one of the communist power’s institutions that has least adapted to market socialism. However, under the pressure of workers struggles, certain factions within the top bureaucracy are entertaining the idea of splitting up the ACFTU and creating local unions to better control workers and to defuse worker discontent under the guise of “independent” unionism. In April 2011, the authorities of Guangdong announced their intention to create a regional union, at the outset intended to sign collective agreements in private companies, most often from Hong Kong or Taiwan. It remains to be seen what this organization’s actual leeway will be vis-à-vis the local authorities and the central government and, especially, how the latter will sanction the project.

A unionism that is truly independent of the State has not developed yet. However, from the point of view of good economic logic, independent unions offer the advantage of being legitimate representatives in negotiations, of permitting the regulation of production relations, and, if the bosses play the game, of avoiding the pitfalls, indeed, the perils of wildcat strikes and excesses of labor discontent. But from the point of view of the ruling class, itself deprived of legitimacy and feeling under siege, union autonomy presents the grave drawback of providing an organizing space for various “subversive elements” that undermine the regime’s stability. There is also the real risk of seeing social unrest coordinated by mass organizations of the Solidarity type turn into a power struggle with the regime. The mere prospect of a mass, working class organization separated from the “party of the proletariat”—though notoriously in the hands of a business caste—must seem quite vertiginous to Party heads. What would remain of its

body of doctrine, already eroded by contradictions? And on what kind of façade of legitimacy could it rest its domination?

豪華 [haohua] Luxury

Our leaders deserve the luxury they live in for two reasons: first, it is fair that they are generously compensated for the benefits they provide the people and that their compensation comes at the expense of the people, who would only be ungrateful to blame them for it; second, in accumulating wealth as industry managers, they are only following the examples of their Western and Japanese counterparts who don't have the reputation of living frugally. The problem evidently comes from the epithets "communist," which describes our Party and "socialist," which describes our politics. It is true that certain directors' luxuries—perhaps too rapidly acquired—seem a little ostentatious and might offend even the least seditious of citizens, notably those nostalgic for the days of Mao Zedong, when we all wore the same uniform and ate from the same iron rice bowl. These parvenus should have the civic responsibility to stuff themselves discreetly, for it is useful in these impoverished times to hide as much as possible the abundance in which our caste wallows. Therefore, it would be judicious to suppress the word "luxury" from the search engines. Let us enjoy our pleasures, that are inaccessible to the common run of people, safely away from envious gazes.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU FOR KEYWORD HARMONY

Who sows privileges reaps revolutions.

LE PÈRE DUCHESNE

In January 2011, Lui Shengqiang, one of the police chiefs of Shenzhen, arranged to have his daughter married in grand style. A sumptuous banquet costing more than 50,000 euros followed the wedding ceremony. According to custom, the married couple received lavish presents and red envelopes (one must keep to tradition) stuffed with paper money. The scandal was such that this cop became the target of an official investigation and was obliged to go "on vacation."

Since April 15th, 2011, the word “luxury,” has been forbidden to appear in advertising, while waiting to be banned on the Web. Given the current direction of “harmonious” development, market studies anticipate that in less than ten years China will represent 44% of the global sales of luxury goods, most this merchandize being produced outside of China.

The display of luxury and opulence constitutes the most visible side of the enrichment of the red mafia. According to a Chinese journal’s recent survey of the groups deemed to be the most trustworthy, prostitutes are in third place after peasants and monks. By contrast, scandals involving the regime’s elite are so common that the class of officials is found at the bottom of the list.

Because of the intimate connection between the new Chinese capitalist class and Party leaders, wealth accumulates first at the summit of the ruling class. The number of millionaires has grown exponentially since the start of the 21st century. According to the national statistics services, 60% of the wealth is concentrated in the hands of .03% of the population in 2010. China’s People’s Congress has become an assembly of millionaires. The Hurun Report, a Website for China’s business leaders, revealed that each of China’s seventy richest representatives possesses an immense fortune. To confirm this trend, we recently discovered the existence of a posh, private club that has organized banquets and other such revolutionary activities on the premises of the Forbidden City in Beijing.

The creation of the world’s largest rapid rail system also obeys the logic of privilege in a two-tiered society—or in this case, a two-speed society. Begun in 2008, the Chinese high-speed trains (China Railway High-speed: the CRH), called the Harmony Express, has run from Beijing to Shanghai since July 1st, 2011.

As in Japan or Europe, China’s network of high-speed trains is a response to the reorganization of space in contemporary society: the movement towards zones of large concentrations of capital, and the movement away from rural and under-populated zones, thus accelerating the desertification of most of the countryside and the formation of great

metropolitan centers. The insistence placed on speed also corresponds to a vision of the times in line with the current ideological canons: immediacy, urgency, and impermanency--all positive values of the market world and alienated life.

The installation of this new high-speed rail network also highlights strong tendencies in Chinese society. First, the enormous funds invested in the construction of rail lines, stations, and trains have permitted the Chinese economy to cushion the costs of the global crisis. In a Keynesian rationale to revive investment in public works, this State project is financed by the sums withdrawn from the balance of trade surplus. In view of China's integration into global capitalism, this redistribution of capital goes well beyond the confines of the Middle Kingdom. The machinery and tools of the high-speed rail assembly plants are effectively German, French and Swiss. Part of the Chinese State's stimulus plan is thus to be found in the order books of industries affected by the crisis all over the world.

Finally, the construction of the high-speed rail lines further underscores the existence of glaring inequalities in China. One needs only to recall that a VIP ticket for the CRH costs five times as much as a traditional train ticket. The CRH is de facto reserved for the red bourgeoisie and for businessmen anxious to save time. The *mingong*, the petitioners, and other proletarians will continue to endure their troubles patiently in overcrowded and dilapidated trains that are part and parcel of the third world to which China still belongs. There is one consolation: they are less likely to find themselves mangled in a serious accident such as the one in Wenzhou in July 2011, where a signal failure caused the collision of two high-speed trains.⁸

Contrary to what killjoys think, the forced-marched construction of a socialist nirvana, the highest stage of happiness, advances with great strides in China—even if this celestial holiday remains reserved for Party dignitaries and for the upper middle classes that have

⁸Faced with protests inflamed by maneuvers to block a serious inquiry into the causes of this train catastrophe, the regime decided to slow down the expansion of high-speed rail lines.

made their allegiance to the Party. But they, too, will not come out of this infernal marathon unscathed.

黑社會 [hei shehui] Mafia

Enemies of the Party don't hesitate to use this damaging term to describe our executives' ingenious and profitable management methods. Some even dare to call the Party itself a vast racket. Let us proscribe as quickly as possible this term, without forgetting to systematically label these groups of agitators as “gangs” and “scoundrels” following the Party's traditions in terms of “talking points.”

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

Small crimes are chastised, but great and serious ones rewarded.

MACHIAVELLI

After Deng's reforms at the end of the seventies—characterized as “opening up” to the market economy—the top Party officials transformed themselves into private managers of a centralized economy that was henceforth divided up. Thanks to this transformation, they expanded the range of favoritism and privilege that they already enjoyed and developed omnipotence, arrogance and corruption.

In today's vernacular, the expression *hei shehui*⁹ (mafia) has become synonymous with the “communist” bureaucracy. This notion of a mafia now refers to the entirety of the Party's apparatus and administration, an entity held together by common interests that imposes its dictatorship over the entire society.

Over time and as a result of industrial and market forces, certain private capitalists are definitely “emancipated” from the Party's iron grip. Nevertheless, close Party ties have remained unavoidable for gaining access to the leadership. Today, this rigid link creates an obstacle for asserting any Chinese capitalist class interests that are independent from those of the Party-State. Indeed, just as there are no free workers' unions, there are no employer organizations independent of the State apparatus. The networks of influence

⁹ Literally “black society.”

and bureaucratic obstacles skew market competition and weigh heavily in conflicts among the capitalists. This situation is a factor in the insecurity of the “new” bosses. Their obligatory allegiance to the Party limits their power and freedom of action. They can be challenged or weakened at any time by the vagaries of their “protectors” careers. This Damocles sword creates insecurity and stifles business initiative. Despite the meteoric rise of private capitalism, one certainty remains: although it is possible to become a capitalist without any direct, natural connection—especially familial—to the highest echelons of the Party, it is impossible to remain so without that support.

Unequal economic growth in different Chinese regions has led certain powerful capitalists to form alliances with particular city or provincial bureaucrats. This done, they couldn’t care less about doctrinal questions; they defend above all their particular interests and to that end make use of political rivalries within the State apparatus. In the case of an uprising or a generalized rebellion, it is not inconceivable that certain capitalists will betray their allegiances and support political reforms more favorable to market mechanisms and social stability, under the banner of orderly “democratization.”

On the lower rungs of the social ladder, Party membership almost always constitutes a means of promotion and acquiring material assets. This is especially the case in the areas of trade and real estate speculation. To enrich itself there, the bureaucratic mafia has the support of the police and the legal system. Fortified by this support, the bureaucratic mafia won’t hesitate to free themselves whenever necessary of the few legal restraints enacted to create the illusion of the rule of law. This is soon revealed when some courageous lawyer tries to have the rule of law respected; then the lawyer, himself, runs the great risk of being charged with “giving away State secrets” or of fomenting trouble. Whereas lower level civil servants are unanimously perceived as corrupt and opposed to the interests of the common people, impunity of the very powerful is the rule. In the hopes of gaining some small recompense, some small privilege, indeed, of climbing the echelons of power by zeal and connivance, becoming a Party member means placing oneself under the command of a mafia that divvies up the country’s riches. As the wise man hums:

*If for pricey bird's nest soup you long,
You will learn to sing the Party's song..*

勞改 [laogai] Forced Labor Camp

Forced labor camps do, of course, exist and are necessary, as much to reeducate deviants as to dissuade anyone who might be tempted to become one. Besides, the camps boost our industries' competitive edge in international markets. And isn't being forced a characteristic feature of labor anyway? Nevertheless, the bad reputation of our camps—concocted by our system's detractors—has tarnished our export companies' image. Even though these camps deserve high praise as pillars of our system, it is best not to mention them at all, so that no one will speak ill of them.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

–BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

You seem to be saying that the people are afraid. We will govern them with the terror of repression; if they shout, we will throw them into prison; if they grumble, we will deport them; if they become agitated, we will send them to the guillotine! You have got it wrong, gentlemen, believe me. The punishment that you inflict is not a remedy against acts of rebellion. Far from being a remedy, or even a palliative, repression only aggravates the ills.

Alexander Marius JACOB¹⁰

It was only after the fall of the Soviet regime that the Gulag system in the USSR finally and officially ceased to exist. Undoubtedly, a similar implosion will have to take place before China's forced labor camp systems are abolished.

Let us begin with a brief overview of China's prison camp system. The Chinese version of the Gulag, *laogai*, actually consists of two distinct institutions: the *laogai* itself, which means reform through labor, and the *laojiao*, or reeducation through labor. Before going further, we should stress that these terms, like the bulk of bureaucratic vocabulary, are deceptive ideological notions. Work—which is by nature performed under constraint and

¹⁰ Alexander Marius Jacob, 1879-1954, an anarchist burglar who spent more than twenty years in the notorious Cayenne penal colony.

degraded by monotony—never “reformed” or “reeducated” anyone; compulsory work (or, if you prefer, forced labor) even less so. We might add in that connection that the ideology of salutary and redeeming labor upheld in our lands steeped in Judeo-Christian morality is common to all regimes.

More than five million prisoners are locked up in *laogai* camps. Harry Wu, who got to know them only too well during his nineteen years of imprisonment, reports that more than 50 million Chinese have been incarcerated in *laogai* camps since 1949 and 20 million are said to have died there. Convicts sentenced to long prison terms (more than three years) are deported there, where they work in agricultural camps, mines, and factories as well, which from the outside look like “normal” factories. The police guard these places with their customary brutality. Prisoners live in close quarters without any privacy whatsoever, the food is awful, and those who fall ill are left virtually uncared for. Nevertheless, the fact that the forced labor camps are institutions answerable to the judicial system entails compliance with certain legal standards intended to more or less ensure the prisoners’ survival.

In contrast, deportation to the *laojiao* is an administrative measure applied directly by the police without going through the court system. Notwithstanding the Party’s plan to abolish the *laojiao*, an intention constantly postponed—perhaps to someday in the misty future when “Great Harmony” is attained—300,000 inmates remain in virtual slavery there. Theoretically, the maximum term of internment is three years, sometimes extended in practice. Since the police are not accountable to anyone, and wardens can exercise total, arbitrary control over their prisoners, inmate conditions are far worse there than in a *laogai*. A prisoner lacking constant family support can easily die of hunger, cold, or disease before the three-year term is up. A number of authors have described the atrocious reality of these camps, after spending many years in them.¹¹

¹¹ Among them Jean Pasqualini (Bao Ruowang) and Rudolph Chelminski (*Prisoner of Mao*, Penguin Books, 1975); Harry Wu (*Laogai: The Chinese Gulag*, Westview Press, 1992, and *Bitter Winds*, Wiley, 1995); Lau Sanching (*Dix Ans dans les Camps Chinois*, L’esprit frappeur, 2001).

With the economy's meteoric rise, one might think that the "modernizers" at the helm in China would have abolished institutions as archaic and as infamous as these two types of forced labor camps. Yet, for the single ruling party, the introduction of the market economy could only be tolerated if its power remained unchallenged. Indeed, it was arguably the market economy, and the consequent slightly better conditions of survival and consumption (including the consumption of "culture"), that enabled the bureaucratic caste to stay in power. These changes, incidentally, indicate the extreme flexibility of capitalism capable of adapting to any political regime from the most liberal to the most totalitarian as long as profits are guaranteed.

Despite opening up to the world market, the political system does not seem open to reform, and its fundamental institutions (particularly the single trade union and the forced labor camps) remain intact. The regime, which is essentially a police State whose cops are all on the take, relies for its survival on systematic recourse to police intervention, or the army in crisis situations, on ubiquitous censorship, and on antiquated slogans. In 2011, China's domestic security budget rose 13.8% and for the first time surpassed its already colossal defense budget, notwithstanding China's status as a global military power and its propaganda exalting nationalist themes—an enduring diversion.

Besides their repressive function, the labor camps for a long time furnished a pool of free labor for all sorts of thankless work. Now these nasty jobs are carried out by *mingong*, migrants who "voluntarily" leave the countryside to be exploited in the factories that have made China the "workshop of the world," and likewise in mines and on major construction projects. It is widely known that conditions in the factory-dormitories of the Special Economic Zones are not very different from those in the forced labor camps: miserable wages, exhausting tasks, unpaid labor, bullying, contempt, confinement, surveillance by brutal guards¹²—as if the factory world were modeled on the world of the concentration camp.

¹² On this topic see, Pun Ngai, *Avis au consommateur*, L'Insomniaque, 2011.

Even though the *mingong* have struck back in recent years and occasionally have won higher wages, they are still subjected to appalling exploitation. One might logically conclude that the *mingong* have made forced labor redundant. But, in fact, the economic function of the labor camps has become secondary. Their main function is to hold a terrible threat over the heads of protesters. In addition to its usual brutality, the police, like the State as a whole, relies on the camps as a tool to maintain its implacable control. As Pan Shinian, a former journalist who spent ten years in a camp (1981–1991), said in our interview with him in 2006, the principal function of the camps is “to maintain terror.”¹³

There is little chance of seeing the camps disappear until the established order is overturned. That day will come when determined popular unrest, after depriving the Party of its “Heavenly Mandate,” razes the eleven hundred concentration camps that have propagated throughout the country the sinister command: “Grovel and shut up.”

¹³ Charles Reeve and Hsi Hsuan-wou, *China Blues: Voyage au pays de l'harmonie précaire*, Verticales, 2008, pp. 84-96.

毛澤東 [Mao Zedong] Mao Zedong

It may seem disrespectful to banish from the Internet the name of this great commander who led our country out of feudalism, who liberated it from foreign presence, and who so permanently installed the Party in control of Chinese society. This seems especially so when some comrades, sometimes within the highest Party ranks, are judiciously trying to revive Party legitimacy by laying claim to the thought of Mao, thereby encouraging the belief that there is debate within the Party—in the absence of any debate *between* parties. However, as the sage says, “Those who invoke ghosts make them say what they want to hear.” In this way, some troublemakers might very well claim the Great Helmsman for themselves by playing upon working class nostalgia for the bygone era of a leveling down. If the memory and cult of Mao Zedong return to be used against the system, whose very foundations he laid, we must not hesitate to erase his name from the Web and from history books and propaganda manuals as well. This will kill two birds with one stone as it will also stop even more dangerous troublemakers, under the guise of criticizing the excesses of Mao’s authority, from effectively criticizing the authority and permanence of the Party he so long directed.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

*But what is sweeter to revenge’s ear
Than the fell tyrant’s last expiring yell?
Yes! than love’s sweetest blisses ‘tis more dear
To drink the floatings of a despot’s knell.*

Percy Bysshe SHELLEY

A highly symbolic fact is that the term “tyrant” today is beginning to be associated with Mao’s name both in protest writing and in popular speech. This rupture in the language expresses a profound change in the way the Chinese government is now perceived since its inception.

Until recently, Mao's place in the popular imagination was mostly positive. Portraits of Mao adorned the crannied walls of poor neighborhoods; plaster busts of Mao were enthroned in restaurants and boutiques; Mao's photographs could be seen like amulets in taxis and trishaws. People said over and over, "Under Mao there was equality and social protection. Now there is nothing!" Mao ended up representing the myth of an egalitarianism that never existed and a social justice that was always absent. In the transition from the inequality of Mao's time, masked by the egalitarianism of poverty, to China's present inequality under "market socialism," masked by the egalitarianism of the marketplace, the work of mystification has been accomplished. Mao supplies an acceptable face to aspirations for freedom upon which the exploited subsist. This avuncular face, however, is far removed from the actual personage: a cruel, manipulative, cynical, and bloodthirsty politician who was responsible for one of the greatest massacres in the 20th century.

We cannot overlook that this image of the popular Mao as the "emperor of the people" brings us back to another image, which founded the official ideology: the great man who led China into the modern world and who guided—at the cost of horrendous human disasters—its economic development. This Mao is the founder of the Communist Party's power, the author of the Chinese version of the vulgate Marxist-Leninism positing the development of the forces of production as the goal of socialism, and the sublime "theoretician" whose apocryphal "Thoughts" were endlessly intoned in the form of truisms and platitudes.

But in the long run, the myth of Mao, face of egalitarianism, falls apart in the face of social contradictions. Little by little, the past brutality of Party domination explains the present situation where the brutality of unchecked capitalism combines with the Party's persistent tyranny. The Chinese are coming to associate Mao—and rightly so—with the authoritarian, bureaucratic, and police nature of the present regime, which harks back to its origins and which is its very being. Along with that, many will discover truths that were more or less concealed in the history of the last century. At some point, it will be hard to remain ignorant of the absolutely autocratic and despotic role of this providential

man, so long perceived as a wise and penetrating player of *weiqi*, unanimously praised for having reestablished national unity and for having inflicted the harsh but necessary cure of egalitarianism from below in a country looted by warlords and foreign powers.

Mao's image is crumbling for the bureaucrats, too. Increasingly Mao's official busts and portraits share the space with those of his old enemy, champion bridge player Deng Xiaoping, father of the economic miracle and butcher of Tiananmen, and especially with old Confucius, ideologue of docility whose timeworn icon employees of the dominant ideology have duly dusted off.

But even within the Party, some minority factions aiming for doctrinal purity have reacted by vehemently claiming Mao's mummy in the name of an improbable dictatorship of the proletariat—certainly an outmoded request but one which if literally followed would inevitably place bureaucrats, who have lately become businessmen and racketeers, into an embarrassing position. Taking into account the widespread discontent provoked by growing social inequality, some of these neo-Maoists have eventually regrouped into new organizations like “the Maoist Communist Party.”

Given the violence of the current situation, even the idea of “communism,”—meaning the abolition of property and social classes—cannot rid itself of the correlation between the word and the reality of the Party's racketeering and mafia character. In popular consciousness, the understanding of communism vaguely refers to the first years of the regime, to the glorious but austere epoch of “true socialism,” when Mao was at the helm and the East was red. This mythical version is founded on the lies of official propaganda, which erased the barbarous events that so bloodied the Maoist period. The parrots of dogma are satisfied with the notion that society was egalitarian under Mao, when it was above all subjected to deprivation; and they observe a careful silence about the privileges the bureaucracy enjoys today behind the opaque curtains of their official limousines and the high walls of their residences.

In the context of internal struggles at the highest party levels, invocation of the heroic founding father can reflect divergent approaches to social and economic difficulties: a swing to the “left” towards a redistribution of resources; alternatively, an unbridled reinforcement of the repressive apparatus to stifle mass discontent. Pro-democracy dissidents (those calling for the transition to democracy) remain on the level of political reformism and demand representative democracy as a bulwark against the resurgence of an even more nakedly totalitarian dictatorship, which Mao as its grand architect has come to symbolize. Meanwhile, the ordinary people, tired of saviors, cult heroes, or hero cults, have taken to heart these words of the poet Bei Dao who proclaimed during the “Cultural Revolution,”¹⁴ “I am not a hero; in an age without heroes, I just want to be a man.”

¹⁴In reality, this was one of the bloodiest mass manipulations in history, compounded by a frenzy of cultural vandalism aiming to dissolve China’s rich past into a dull uniformity of the entire society. On this subject, see Hsi Hsuan-wou *et al.*, *Révo. Cul. dans la Chine pop.*, 1974, pp. 10-18; and Simon Leys, *The Chairman’s New Clothes: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1978.

民工 [mingong] Migrant

The migrant workers' low wages have enabled our industry to attain its extraordinary level of productivity. Thanks to the judicious management of these human resources, which are so plentiful in our country, the system has learned how to evolve and perpetuate itself, and Party executives have benefitted from bonuses as their just reward for their wisdom and loyalty. This word should nevertheless be censored because good souls easily become emotional about the living conditions of migrants, as they do of prisoners condemned to hard labor, which, it is true, are hardly enviable. Westerners, jealous that they cannot exploit their own spoiled and rebellious populations as effectively, frequently evoke the “horrors of the industrial revolution” in reference to the employment of migrants, while forgetting how badly they treat their own immigrant workers. Let us leave these sated humanitarians to their hypocritical, naïve optimism and placate their scruples by imposing silence over anything connected to the fate of these coarse beings, predestined for slavery like the pig is for the butcher's knife.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

I came here, calm, a worker,
My sole wealth my tranquil arms,
To find the bosses in great cities,
And it made a rioter out of me.¹⁵

GASPARD DES USINES

The migrants or *mingong*—shortened from *nonmingong*, literally: workers from the peasantry—represent the population that left rural China beginning in the 1980s to get hired in “the workshop of the world.” Today there are around 200 million *mingong* working in private factories in the various Special Economic Zones and in huge construction sites in urban centers. In the great metropolises, the *mingong* also supply the majority of the badly paid, precarious labor for commercial services from cleaning to restaurant work.

¹⁵ Adaptation of Verlaine's poem, Kaspar Hauser speaks (*Sagesse* III:ii.)

In companies where they have employment, their foreign or Chinese bosses, who little by little have replaced the State in running the economic engine, ferociously exploit them. Packed into factory-dormitories, watched over by brutal guards, lodged in rooms offering only minimal comfort, subjected to speed up and forced overtime, badly paid, and often not paid on time, migrants are experiencing the unenviable fate known to all peasants throughout the capitalist world who have been forced into this exodus that began more than two centuries ago.

The *mingong* are subjected to an additional constraint (and humiliation): the *hukou*. “Communist” China, now the China of “market socialism,” still hasn’t gotten rid of this system leftover from serfdom that ties people to their place of birth. A Chinese holder of a rural *hukou* (certificate of residence) will remain a “peasant” in the eyes of the bureaucracy for his or her entire life. This means that even though they come by the hundreds of millions to work in cities, these migrants will remain undocumented in their own country, as happened earlier to the millions of immigrant workers who came to the great capitalist centers to be exploited. Holding only a provisional city *hukou*, they are at the mercy of the police who can arbitrarily decide to send them back to their place of origin under any pretext. They cannot benefit from any social welfare services available to city residents, and their children cannot attend city schools. In rare cases, migrants manage to get a permanent urban *hukou* through marriage or through subterfuge.

The bureaucracy regularly brings up abolishing this unfair system, but without ever jeopardizing it, since it is so useful for keeping that section of the population contributing the most to the economic “miracle” in a state of terror. During the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, the *hukou* furnished police with the useful pretext of “cleansing” the city of all the destitute from the countryside. Three years later, again using the rural status of the *mingong*, Shenzhen authorities launched an operation to remove 80,000 undesirables who were supposedly menacing the city hosting the “Universiades” in the summer of 2011. This system has become an indispensable tool for controlling other populations as well, notably, the most restless and rebellious sections of the working class.

As some of the regime's critics have pointed out, an entire generation of the peasantry has been sacrificed as *mingong* to make China an economic power. But as the Sichuanese workers riots of May 2011 (in Chaozhou and a month later in the Zengcheng municipality, located in the heart of the industrial Guangdong Province) have demonstrated, the second generation of migrants is less resigned. All the talk about "harmony" today is because there is none. Tied to the rural world by family links and the *hukou*, but familiar with the violent conditions of exploitation that capitalism imposes, this population concentrates all the contradictions that make it a restless proletariat. The regime has good reason to fear that it will become fully conscious of its situation. Within the *mingong*, women whose salaries have freed them from the retrograde and sclerotic patriarchy now display a spirit of independence and even militancy.

Given the place they occupy in the structure of a still largely export-based industry, the Chinese migrants play a central role in today's world economy. Their growing resistance jeopardizes not only the tidy surplus value that the Chinese sweatshop bosses extort from them, but also the extravagant profit margins that the Western importers realize from Chinese goods. If they should decide to vigorously take matters into their own hands, the rate of global profit would suffer and the consequences of their revolt on the global market system would be of unprecedented magnitude. Long despised, scorned, and super exploited, they are about to make themselves feared not only by their bosses and the Chinese leadership but by all the capitalist managers on the planet—these inveterate players are slow to realize that they have relied too heavily on industrial relocations, just as they have lately counted too much on financial hocus-pocus. And it's precisely this new interdependence of economic "exchanges" that makes the strength of the *mingong*, these two hundred million indigents thrust into the torment of the "war of all against all."

民主 [minzhu] Democracy

Western leaders who criticize our “lack of democracy” have a lot of nerve. If our elites were as assured as Westerners are of being renewed in office via the ballot box—regardless of their transgressions or failings—we could see adopting a pluralist electoral system, just as the Japanese elites were forced to do after their defeat in 1945. The single Chinese Party could be transformed into a dominant party, surrounded by an inoffensive opposition; or else it could be split into two complicit formations, one more or less progressive, the other more or less conservative as exist in most Western nations—a legacy from the era of intense class struggle. After all, there is less difference today between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party in the United States, or even between the European Right and Left—so interchangeable—than within the various factions of our Party, which contains millions of members coming from all social levels and whose interests are necessarily contradictory. Furthermore, how can we give our people, who are for the most part coarsened and embittered by poverty, even the illusion of choosing their masters, like in representative democracies? In short, we will discuss this again when our compatriots become as well-fed as the Swedes or the Californians. Meanwhile, let us frankly carry on with our authoritarian methods; let us praise their merits and especially their economic effectiveness. And since we have chosen to overtly muzzle public expression instead of letting the laws of the free market operate to restrict it, let us without any haggling prohibit any reference to democracy!

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

Dictatorship is shut your mouth; democracy is talk away

Old popular adage

In China, as in all societies where there are struggles to break free of dictatorships, notions of democracy and “democratizing the institutions” are particularly worrisome to the regime.

Since the Tiananmen massacre in 1989, the loudest dissidents have been demanding the transformation of the regime into a Western type of democracy.¹⁶ In China, where democratic traditions are nonexistent, the precise meaning of this demand depends on the social status of those formulating it. Nevertheless, it invariably refers to a model of parliamentary representation with political parties assumed to express society’s diverse interests.

In this period of reforms and despite its closed façade, the Chinese CP is beginning to evolve. While any organized tendency within the Party is still prohibited, various currents of opinion are tolerated—at least at the highest levels. Nevertheless, the regime’s totalitarian nature and methods of operating have not fundamentally changed.

Today, the idea of “democratizing” the regime attracts fringes of society well beyond the small community of known dissidents. These latter are known and hunted down because they boldly say and write what many people think quietly, including those within the Party—those whom Liu Xiabo, the Nobel Peace Prize winner currently in prison, calls “the clandestine militants of democracy.” Almost everyone in this opposition shares the idea that “democratization” cannot follow a violent revolutionary path, but must result from long, progressive, and peaceful efforts—a kind of non-subversive subversion.

The first observation such a goal raises is that it is contradicted by the recent history of Chinese society. Faithfully attached to representative democracy, Western sinologists and businessmen have long argued that the development of Chinese capitalism would encourage the formation of representative democracy in China on the Western model. However, China’s economic development has not at all transformed institutions. On the

¹⁶We mean that this is not a direct democracy—which would be incompatible with any form of capitalism—but a representative democracy, where the electorate’s representatives are limited to making laws while the executive branch, at its own discretion, fills the key administrative posts.

contrary, the more the Chinese regime gains in economic power, the less it is tempted to undergo “reforms” in a democratic sense. The political “reforms” that the very authoritarian Deng Xiaoping underscored as necessary have shown themselves to be simple administrative adjustments serving to better run the totalitarian regime and the economy. Better yet, according to a new ideological argument showing up recently within the Party, economic success would be proof of the dictatorship’s efficiency. As was the case earlier during the confrontation between democracy and fascism, the attraction of this economic success has ended up infecting even Western capitalists and their ideologues. They are now starting to envy the effectiveness of the Chinese dictatorship so capable of ensuring industrial peace, the guarantee of a good level of profits. Others who are more humanitarian worry that China’s example might prove that capitalism doesn’t necessarily lead to parliamentary democracy with its political parties and elections every four or five years.

Another particularly stubborn reality that contradicts the program of peaceful “democratization” is unfolding before of our eyes—and the eyes of the Chinese people—in Tunisia and Egypt. This is the reality of street actions, mass demonstrations, and strikes that have occurred at the end of authoritarian client regimes, firmly installed in power and protected by mercenary armies.

For the exploited Chinese classes, the word “democracy” crystallizes the desire for a society free of corruption, favoritism, mafias, arrogance, disdain for the poor, authoritarianism, and repression, in short, all the things that constitute the daily diet of the proletariat. They have little reason to believe that changing the regime will happen smoothly or peacefully. Intuitively and from experience, they sense that the Party having become a mafia will change only in order to preserve its power and will not leave except by force. If for them democracy can just as well mean party pluralism and free elections, the word above all is synonymous with equality and social justice.

In a dictatorship the least one can do is demand democracy. This demand expresses the rejection of oppressive authority; it expresses also the negation of totalitarianism. Not

having experienced the reality of democracy, the Chinese don't know that democracy cannot meet their expectations for emancipation. Certainly fear and terror are less oppressive in democratic regimes. But these regimes also produce privilege, corruption, inequality, and social injustice. With the promotion of money and consumerism as the measure of all things, social ties are broken and individualism is imposed, leaving people prey to alienated and meaningless lives. We see it already in Egypt and Tunisia, where the exploited classes are the first to go from myth to reality when they realize that their desired liberty and well-being are in no way realized with the arrival of the anti-totalitarian reformers' venerated democracy.

The belief in formal equality is the naive foundation of dissident thought in China. This legal equality is supposed to bring about and ultimately guarantee social equality. In the West, the poor know that it only masks the capitalist system's inherent social inequality. When the *mingong*, the petitioners, the factory or office workers organize collectively to defend their dignity and survival, they discover through their own actions the necessity of going beyond political reformism. For them, access to formal equality certainly constitutes a considerable change, but in no way does it mean the end of privilege or even a better future. Their hatred of the "communist" mafia carries with it a radicalism that distinguishes it from the democratic dissidents' cautious and conciliatory proposals. And it is in this difference that the possibilities of a new society reside. Democratic dissidents show an apprehension and caution towards the workers' accumulated rage that hardly differs from the fears of the leaders, who endlessly repeat that the Chinese people are not ready for democracy.

Ready or not to apply Montesquieu's or Jefferson's maxims, the Chinese might practically reflect on "the Letter to a democrat"¹⁷ that Hsi Hsuan-wou sent to a Chinese friend the day after the Tiananmen massacre:

"The democracy that you along with the urban middle classes demand is doubly unrealistic. Illusory happiness (we know something about that) is also an impossible happiness (the West is not ready to stop looting you). You must admit

¹⁷ See Hsi Hsuan-wou and Charles Reeve, *Bureaucratie, bagnes et business*, L'Insomniaque, 1997, p. 115.

that it's only a big dream that the media spread all over the planet. [...] The tidy democracy shown on television, with its proper elections, its nice leaders, its good salaries, and its enjoyment of lovely leisure time, has no more to do with reality than does the 'communist happiness' your bureaucrats have promised you over the last forty years. Will you, too, fall into this trap and add yourselves to the ranks of the mystified? [...]

"In closing, I will tell you, that the call for democracy only adds to the prevailing confusion. All Western democracies have an interest in pretending to see themselves in those far away struggles like the one you have just experienced. This reinforces the idea that Western democracies are desirable. The fact that people in Burma, the Philippines, China are ready to die for this fantasy gives power to the idea that democracy is the only possible wealth, that it is the best government ever found, that it is here for eternity. Since Western democracy's victory over Nazism, this much proclaimed 'end of history' is probably the best kind of totalitarianism it could find."

上訪 [shangfang] Petition

This word signifies the approach adopted by the embittered and unfortunate who have no other options but to bring their grievances and complaints to the authorities. As long as they do this humbly, their behavior is not annoying and their grumbling hardly disturbs our social harmony. But it is another matter when they raise their voices and besiege our administrative centers, and when the Internet threatens to become an immense Petitions Office! Only praises should be publicized as they justly show our leaders' understanding and magnanimity. It would be wise to cover over all these complaints with a thick sheet of lead beginning with the suppression of this unseemly word.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

–BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

Tis I who am complained of, I who make the quarrel!

MOLIÈRE

The Misanthrope, IV, III

From the time of the Manchu Empire, the central government equipped itself with an institution that the common people could appeal to if they thought they were victims of injustice. In 1949, the Maoist government continued this tradition and created a Petitions Office in Beijing where individuals could send letters or go in person to complain about some unjust measure taken against them. By maintaining this secular institution, the central power could award itself a clear conscience and flatter itself as listening to ordinary citizens. Moreover, it furnished a vague outlet to victims convinced of their rights.

With the introduction of “reform” and “opening” in the early 1980s, inseparably linked to an invitation to get rich, the red bourgeoisie was seized with a hunger for inordinate profits that even the most blatant excesses could not appease. Corruption, expulsions, destruction of housing, and seizures of arable lands reached such proportions that the number of despoiled people grew exponentially. Petitioners began streaming into Beijing.

The Petitions Office, located south of the capital building, near the Beijing Southern Railway Station, was quickly overrun and could not respond fast enough to these unfortunates. The areas around the railway station were soon transformed into an immense, ad hoc campground populated by protesters from all over China. In this gigantic slum, life was little by little organized out of the means at hand. Some of the cabins became shops, others hostels. Some NGOs brought aid to the needy crowds, providing them with food rations. Some petitioners dug in for months, even years, in the hopes of seeing their wrongs one day addressed.¹⁸

During the “clean up” of Beijing preceding the Olympic games, this favela was destroyed, but the Office remained open, and the petitioners had to scatter throughout the city, which all the more emphasizes the precariousness of their situation today.

A complaint filed in Beijing can be damaging to the public image of provincial bureaucrats involved in the complaint. If too many complaints come from districts under their administration, their future in the bureaucracy could be jeopardized. These local authorities then recruit thugs to force the petitioners back to their homeland before they can file their complaints. Petitioners fear these goons, who act with brutality and complete impunity under the complacent eyes of the police, and flee from them as from the plague.¹⁹

The Petitions Office presents a picture of the entire country: there the victims of the new red bourgeoisie’s corruption and greed pile up waiting for justice to be served, just as the *mingong* packed into their factory-dormitories accumulate grievances with growing restiveness, just as the young wait less and less patiently for the good life and for freedom of expression, until... Until when?

¹⁸For over ten years the filmmaker Zhao Liang filmed these areas and produced an edifying documentary on this subject, *Petition: the Plaintiffs’ Court* (a French version was produced by the INA in 2010).

¹⁹An episode of Zhao Liang’s film evokes the drama of petitioners who were killed by a train while fleeing the goons. The survivors organized a protest demonstration during which one of them proposed to read a blistering tract against the regime. This tract is reproduced in the appendix.

太平 [taiping] Taiping

As the immortal comrade Stalin well understood, the study of the past, more than any other field of knowledge, must be purged of everything that can stir up seditious ideas. Certain historical moments constitute such regrettable examples that it is better to rewrite them expunging elements likely to fuel present unrest. Chinese historians are not the only ones doing this, but thanks to our Party's foresight, they have complete latitude here and don't hesitate to add their contributions to building harmonious market socialism. Although the Taiping movement has long been held up as a primitive precursor to our communism, it might now be necessary to present the Taiping as a horde of fanatics who precipitated the downfall of the old order and caused terrible problems. This could be done quickly thanks to our control of the Internet, which we imagine Mao would have put to great use. If any new Taiping should appear on the historical horizon, they will not be able to draw their inspiration from the armed feats of their predecessors. Let's erase the Taiping!

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

The Taiping Rebellion is one of the most gripping dramas in the history of all time. This is so because of its enormous dimensions, probably without precedent in any country, by its terrifying massacres whose number of victims equals the entire population of France at that time. It is so because of its radical communism existing side by side with its shocking medieval aspects. Again, it is so because of its questioning of a Confucian social order that was until then untouchable.

Jacques RECLUS²⁰

The Taiping Uprising of 1851 came to life in the countryside of southern China, in Guangxi, led by Hong Xiuquan, a visionary and convert to Protestantism. This radical

²⁰Jacques Reclus, *La Révolte des Taiping*, L'Insomniaque, 2008.

uprising of poor peasants, forced from their land by destitution, confronted landowners as well as the mandarin bureaucracy, pickled in Confucian maxims, and ended by endangering the Manchu power.

After a lightening conquest of the southern half of China, the rebels took over Nanking where they set up their new government. From then on, the Taiping gradually wore themselves out in a war of resistance against the imperialist powers that would eventually crush them. They weakened themselves by installing a new class of leadership modeled after that of their enemies and furnished with a new bureaucracy and customs borrowed from the very traditions they fought against. Their aping of delusions of grandeur and the introduction of a kind of war communism would be fatal for them. Towards the end of the uprising, with the active complicity of the predatory Western powers, the imperial armies inflicted defeat after defeat on the Taiping; and the fall of Nanking ended the adventure in 1864.

It is well known that the new red mandarins are not stingy with their praise of the beneficial effects of Confucianism, deemed to justify submission to social inequality. So it is not surprising that the Taiping rebellion has been virtually left out of official propaganda and almost systematically swept into the dustbin of history. Only a few small notes in textbooks and popular histories are devoted to it, which specifically insist on the anti-Manchu character of the movement and on the support of foreign powers in their military defeat. There is even a museum dedicated to it in Nanking, which recalls very opportunistically in the present context the greatness of Han nationalism in the face of its enemies. It would be wrong, however, to think that the social dimensions of this bloody episode have been totally erased from the underground meanderings of collective memory. Perhaps the work of the old mole will one day make the remembrance of this revolt against the powerful resurface in the actions of a new, great rebellion. Before the Taiping uprising became an anti-Manchurian movement, it was first a popular, social revolt against injustice and iniquities. Before its final degeneration, the Taiping movement had initiated a division of the land, which could not but win over the immense peasantry. It had introduced a primitive equality of class and gender, and it had abolished

land ownership, all actions that show an idealism hardly compatible with the cynical pragmatism claimed by today's market logic. The promise of the *tai-ping*—in the sense of the “great equality”—remains more relevant than ever.

未來 [weilai] Future

When used ill advisedly, this word can incite Chinese citizens to dream and let themselves be tempted by dangerous utopian notions, and consequently to deviate from the path of pragmatism recommended by the Party. If serious trouble occurs, we must quickly suppress any debates over the future, because antisocial elements or those directed from abroad will undoubtedly try to seduce the credulous masses by promising them a radiant future other than ours. If our party has used and abused such eschatological trickery in the past, we must recognize that this nearly caused us to lose control of the confused masses. We will not make that mistake again.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

–BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

*Our past is gloomy, our present is unlivable,
fortunately we have no future.*

Punk adage

During the thirty years that preceded the “opening up” (to the global market), the Chinese CP exercised absolute authority by wielding two complementary tools: the police and ideology. The police exercised a latent threat whose force was felt only in cases of breach of the law. Ideology exercised a permanent pressure through the constant pouring of torrents of lying propaganda over the heads of its frightened citizens. One of the axes of this propaganda was that the present reality of work, submission, and all kinds of deprivation (“socialism”) was the necessary condition for happiness in the society of the future (“communism”). That was the perspective announced by the expression “singing tomorrows”.

For lack of singing, the tomorrows were forever put off until the day when the only way the bureaucracy could survive was to renounce the miserable rigors of State capitalism and adopt the canons of market socialism. “Make money!” became the watchword of the

day. The last thirty years of reform have resulted in a gigantic growth in the production of consumer goods (a teaspoonful for the interior market, a ladleful for the international market) and a more modest increase in the consumption of these same goods. In outward appearance, China has changed considerably. People can now dress as they please and listen to songs of their choice. In the cities, people can freely choose their sexual partners. People can communicate—but always under surveillance—by telephone or the Internet; and there is a much greater choice of reading material and other entertainments, although many books and films are censored, especially when they take up political or moral issues.

Despite this progress, more and more Chinese think their future, if a future exists for them, is located outside the Chinese borders. In other words, if the future is to be capitalist, then it's better to choose the original over a copy. Men and women from all walks spend millions of yuan each year, sometimes indebting themselves for many years, to pay the “snake heads” (mafia smugglers) who will take them, often by torturous routes, to distant countries where they have placed their hopes for a better life. The ruling class, however better off, is also ready to pay dearly to send its own progeny to study abroad. Western universities are now full of Chinese students coming to spend a few years far from their homeland. Of these hundreds of thousands of lucky students, only a quarter of them decide to return to China, with or without a diploma. Some of them have taken care to conceal a foreign passport permitting them to escape one day if necessary.

What will the future be for all those who are obliged to remain within the country? Outside of some meager perks and feeble glimmers of a consumer society that is a pale copy of the West, the majority of Chinese must continue to be satisfied with low salaries, exhausting work, infinitely extended work hours, scanty housing, crowded transportation. They have to live in cities where the rate of pollution exceeds world records and will only worsen. The list of calamities the Chinese proletariat has experienced is already long, until the next disaster (“natural” or otherwise)²¹ comes along and ravages the country.

²¹ Among the probable disasters, one can imagine an earthquake that wrecks havoc on faulty building constructions, a rupture of the Three Gorges Dam—built on a dangerous site against the

In a word, the future, for China more than for the West, is a privilege that the wealthy would prefer to put off, given their uncertainty about controlling all its parameters.

advice of many experts and where problems are already piling up, an explosion of a nuclear reactor as reliable as that of Fukushima, or a tidal wave like the one that recently struck the coast at Dalian—catastrophes that will amplify the central one: the demographic catastrophe.

畏懼 [weiju] Fear

Fear is more or less acknowledged to be the active principle of all governments on the surface of the earth, and even more so for a regime like ours where our population's submission is more important than its adherence to the system. Domination breaks down when the despair of the oppressed compels them to *fear their own fear* of their masters, that is to say, when they are *no longer afraid of anything*. When this renewal of defiance feeds unrest, it is often seen that the authorities themselves are at risk of succumbing to panic; then the logic of terror can be reversed to the point of undermining the loyalty of our best troops. With the first signs of an uprising, therefore, it is best to pretend that this strategic but unstable emotion does not exist and to take the precaution of making it a taboo word.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

All that crawls on earth is governed by the lash.

HERACLITUS

Upon the establishment of the Maoist regime, fear was one of the mainsprings by which the new ruling class exercised power. Fear became a mode of governance by the communist party's use of means to secure its tight control over society: police and especially the secret police, the militia, neighborhood committees, and, finally, rampant recourse to denunciation to turn everyone into a potential informer on his or her neighbor, workmate, or even family member.

Now, thanks to the more sophisticated technology of social control, there is no longer any area of a citizen's life that isn't under government surveillance. Any individual suspected of the slightest deviance from Party morality can see every aspect of his or her existence menaced by the guardians of order. He or she risks not only the wrath of the police, with placement in "reeducation through labor centers," or of the justice system, with

incarceration in camps of “reform through labor,” but also the loss of employment, lodging, and the benefit of social insurance, etc. Beyond being banished from society, the individual automatically risks endangering his or her entire family, which will be hit with the same opprobrium. The meaning of a totalitarian regime takes on its full significance when one understands that it threatens all aspects of life. This is the reign of omnipresent fear that has weighed on the Chinese since 1949.

With the “reform” and “opening” policies put into effect in the past thirty years, the regime has considerably relaxed its strictures. Many films, books and journals that earlier would have been banished are now widely available. A careless remark that could have landed you in the *laogai* is tolerated today. You can dress as you please, enjoy sexual relations outside of marriage, leave the countryside of your birth to work in the city, welcome a foreigner to your home, travel around China and even abroad. So many behaviors that seem commonplace to Westerners and once would have been severely punished in the name of a narrow puritanism are more or less accepted today. But this liberal façade should not deceive us. The repressive apparatus that enforces prohibitions is still there. The regime may not necessarily make use of the information it gathers on each citizen, but it continues to keep everyone under close surveillance. Certain books can be published without restriction, but publications are all subject to censorship and anything the government deems a threat can be prohibited. You can travel as you please but at any moment you may be brought in to justify your travels. You can welcome a foreigner into your home, but your neighbors are responsible for making regular reports about such occurrences. You can talk about all sorts of things, but the government’s big ears are always listening. Whatever the case, comments or criticisms against the regime are only tolerated if expressed in private, that is to say, if you don’t have any crazy ideas about putting them into practice along with others sharing the same thoughts.

That fuzzy uncertainty gave rise to a new weariness, a new fear. Everyone is aware that there is a limit to everything, an unspoken, unwritten line that must not be crossed; and no one forgets that it is inflexible. To avoid trouble, it is necessary to be aware of this red line and to avoid crossing it. In this way, one is led to internalize repression, to monitor

one's words, to become one's own cop. A higher stage of intimidation is thus reached, one that is deeper and more refined.

Once the leadership feels directly threatened, it censors, arrests, and imprisons. Drawing from the lessons of the Tiananmen massacre where the army served as the means of repression, the regime now relies on a plethora of anti-riot troops who are well-equipped, dependable, and better adapted to the tricky task of maintaining order—an expertise of which France is a great exporter.²²

Although more diffuse than in the past, the glacial reign of fear continues. But anxiety is also growing within the leadership's ranks, as the massive emigration of wealthy, high-ranking cadres over the last fifteen years shows.²³ “Mass incidents” have been so numerous and frequent over the past ten years that they have come to represent a permanent threat to the bureaucrats. Furthermore, despite censorship and repression, mobile phones and the Internet have become so efficient a means of communication that the regime sees in them a menace as diffuse as the fear by which it governs.

Without being able to predict the unpredictable or affirm with any scientific accuracy that China is on the brink of a movement strong enough to sweep the autocrats in Beijing from power, it seems they are beginning to have a clear sense of what's right in front of their noses. In a speech on February 19, 2011, Supreme Leader of the Party Hu Jintao invited high-ranking cadres to improve their “social management skills” and to “resolutely correct unhealthy practices that abuse the people's rights and interests.” Prime Minister Wen Jaibao, for his part, was upset after visiting “petitioners” besieging the Petitions Office on January 24, 2011, and in March 2011 called for “the creation of conditions permitting people to criticize and supervise the government.”

²² In the Spring of 2008, for example, a few weeks after the bloody repression in Tibet, a delegation of French policemen was sent to China to train its police.

²³ A confidential report published by the People's Bank of China in 2011 estimated that some 18,000 wealthy Chinese chose to move to North America, with 85 million euros in their suitcases. And 27% of the 20,000 Chinese possessing more than \$15 million dollars have left to live abroad.

The subordination of society to modern capitalist relations has brought about new contradictions that require more supple and complex policies, but which make institutions more vulnerable. The direct and brutal repression exercised in the past does not interact well with the characteristics and constraints of a modern market society. The Maoist era's forms of propaganda and surveillance are no longer suitable for the hedonistic and individualistic realities of life in an increasingly urban society. These forms have had to evolve in order to adapt, and in the end they have persisted under new guises without losing too much of their effectiveness. The same maintenance of order and punishment of heretics goes on. Social control and prevention of "unforeseen mass incidents" are more formidable tasks today than in the already distant time of Tiananmen. But once a dog has bitten and drawn blood, it never loses a taste for it. Fear is a bad counselor: it is always to be expected that rulers at bay will again and again use terror against those whose vindictiveness they dread.

幸福 [xingfu] Happiness

Rather than a communist paradise, the Party should now promise its citizens individual happiness to maintain the discipline needed to build socialism. The impatience of the masses, plots by the Party's enemies, or the occurrence of an industrial or natural disaster could bring about great upheavals before this goal is accomplished. Citizens who are tired of seeking personal happiness through obedience and sacrifice might try to find it collectively through rebellion. So we must suppress the word "happiness" from the Web and replace it with the word "harmony"—according to our wise Confucius, of course, and not the dreamer Fourier. We must return to the more heroic notions of sacrifice and abnegation in service of the public good.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

Hence King Pausole understood the art of escaping all regrets by changing the definition of happiness as dictated by circumstances.
Pierre LOUÏS

In a speech delivered just before the convocation of the two assemblies (called the "Two Sessions," *lianghui*), Prime Minister Wen Jiabao called for "happiness and satisfaction of the masses to become the standard for evaluating public officials' performances rather than the number of sky scrapers or other projects undertaken." A little later, a bureaucrat from a northern province declared in turn, "Obtaining the people's happiness is the centerpiece of our work! Happiness, happiness, happiness! Henceforth, this should be our only watchword!"

For the last few years, the propaganda apparatus has been trying to drown public consciousness in the idea that thanks to the policy of "reform and opening up," the Party has been working on establishing a harmonious society. To this end, it has retrieved the dusty figure of Confucius from the oblivion it fell into after the celebrated 1970s campaign: *Pi lin pi kong!* (Let's criticize Lin Biao, let's criticize Confucius!). At the

Temple of Confucius in Beijing in 2007, a picture exhibition with accompanying text recalled the great man's merits and praised his "democratic spirit." Did not this wise man foresee that society would experience "moderate prosperity" before attaining "Great Harmony?"

Undoubtedly because this latest campaign was not as successful as anticipated, Wen Jiabao felt obliged to decree a quest for "happiness," an idea as novel as it is improbable in the industrial inferno that China has become. Be that as it may, under the surface of capitalist modernity—its suits and ties, skyscrapers, highways, boulevards, beltways, parking garages, Disneyland, high-speed rails, TV, mobile phones, computers, the Internet, and all their accompanying pollutants—the Maoist propaganda apparatus has remained intact.

It should be mentioned that the ruling class has good reasons to be anxious about the population's mood. According to a recent Gallop poll, only six percent of the Chinese people say they are happy. Another survey by Zhongguowang (China Web) finds that forty percent believe that it is the amount of wealth that determines whether one is happy or not.

To stay in power, the totalitarian regime is obliged to rain down a steady stream of lies on its citizens. But what kind of "happiness" can the Chinese bureaucrats conceive of for its citizens? Is it what they themselves enjoy: namely, importing at great expense luxury cars from Germany and Japan, enjoying many domestic servants, frequenting the city's best restaurants and luxury hotels, building maharajah-like villas for themselves, sending their children to the best schools, offering them study abroad (and if they decide not to return, so much the better), building the best golf courses in the world? It goes without saying that extending these forms of happiness to everyone is by definition impossible. Impunity and material abundance, the myriad of privileges and other favors that the regime's discretionary powers confer can only benefit a minority. And this minority is only able to enjoy these advantages because the great majority of the citizens work enormously hard and receive only crumbs from the considerable profits reaped by the companies that

employ them. The “happiness” that an upper bureaucrat claims for ordinary people, therefore, can only be a lure used to make them endure their situation for as long the regime stays in power.

What could happiness mean for the “average” Chinese? Many dare to look for it in a series of negations: rejection of authority; denunciation of corruption; open criticism of the arrogance of the rich and powerful; refusal of grueling work; ever more vociferous complaints about pitiful salaries, cramped lodging, crowded transportation, brutal evictions and destruction of housing; growing contempt for the only consolation available to their misery: the cheap rubbish and junk sold everywhere along with its pathetic advertising images taking over public space. As is evident in China, as elsewhere, the abundance of goods and artificial social relations resulting from a society based on the competition of all against all is not that happy. Despite the horrors of the Maoist dictatorship, there are even those who regret this grotesque past, where the most widespread poverty was in their eyes proof of equality for all. Such regrets say a lot about the frustrations felt today.

If happiness remains a “novel idea” around the globe since the start of the industrial revolution, the world has nevertheless seen the beginnings of a few productive utopias: like those in Spain in 1936, in France in 1968, and in Chiapas in 1994. It is hard to imagine the world the Chinese might build when one day, fed up with of the yoke of wheeler-dealer bureaucrats decked out as captains of modern industry, they decide to take matters into their own hands. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that it will have anything to do with the plastic happiness that today’s post-Maoist *spin doctors* peddle in trying to save the tottering Party. For on that day, the very notion of happiness will have been redefined and happiness itself will have changed sides.

壓力 [yali] Stress

We hear wage earners every day complaining more and more about too harsh working conditions and the stress it causes. We agree with our business comrades that nobody works hard enough. With a population large as ours, we can permit ourselves a few suicides in addition to thousands of victims of industrialization. In general, work only kills or drives crazy the weakest ones whom we can well do without. Moreover, stress is an imported notion that doesn't correspond to anything in our age-old culture. Proud of their history, hard-working people would not confuse temporary fatigue in the service of their country with this degenerate notion that presupposes the absence of a work ethic. Chinese workers have always had a sense of sacrifice. The cyberwhinings about stress are rude, antipatriotic provocations used to demoralize the public. If healthy fatigue in the service of developing a harmonious society is socialist, then stress, especially when it turns into suicide attempts, raises a form of sabotage that cannot be tolerated. It is therefore appropriate to prohibit any mention of this occurrence on the Web and to let natural selection do its job.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

*Always on the go
To make more dough.
When long run
Life is done
Roland TOPOR*

In 2007, the Chinese Medical Association conducted an investigation in about thirty Chinese cities and found that the majority of Chinese people suffer from fatigue, insomnia and digestive trouble—disorders linked to working conditions and stress. More than anyone else, young workers, especially women, in the “workshop of the world,” experience the economy’s ever more hectic and implacable tempo. The splendid years of

double-digit growth are also those of increasing suicide rates, one of the main causes of death for young people, particularly young migrants. That is the price to pay to thrive in “harmony!”

The hardening of social relations is a striking trait of contemporary Chinese society. The deconstruction of the old social fabric, the crisis of the traditional family, and the overturning of traditional values have all resulted from the atomization of productive tasks, like that of individual lives lost and isolated in the immense megalopolises. The school and the university have become places of fierce competition among students under pressure to succeed academically before inflicting on themselves the torments of careerism. This pressure reaches such extremes for students and executives that they, too, are ending their lives in greater numbers.

Up to the present, the Chinese middle classes have steadfastly supported the regime’s actions and expressed boundless confidence in the country’s prosperity. Their very existence was given as proof of the dictatorship’s success in creating conditions for a consumer society. But there are clouds on the horizon. Since 2006, the number of jobless graduates continues to grow. Precariousness and stress are now showing up in the ranks of the young, dynamic executives—no doubt an irrefutable sign of modernity, like the suicides of France Telecom’s young executives, debilitated by their belief in a system that crushes them; or the Japanese *salarymen*, victims of *karoshi* (sudden death due to “overwork”). In this self-annihilation and moral suffering, the middle classes are coming to be sacrificed on the altar of progress just like the Chinese proletariat.

宗教 [zongjiao] Religion

We thought we had eradicated superstition by replacing religious cults and theologies with the cult of the Party and our simple dogmas, which cultivate a moral order and spiritual submissiveness, likely envied by a good many theocracies. For years, all we had to do was persecute a handful of monks and assign the others to play bit parts in kung fu movies—as in Hong Kong, or in local decision-making bodies, wherever we needed to bolster our legitimacy by professing a fictional respect for local traditions—as in Tibet. But the turmoil that accompanied the transition to a market economy has shaken our doctrinal coherence and has revived old beliefs. Some religious groups have become hotbeds of conspirators, who, on the pretext of combating materialism, have, in fact, agitated for spiritual sedition or, worse still, for the secession of backward regions. The fanaticism of these rebellious souls must not be allowed to inflame the ire of the starving masses and idealistic youth. By its very nature, the Internet lends itself to cultism and iconolatry. As long as our ideology holds undisputed sway within our linguistic turf, the Internet will serve the Party's designs and law enforcement. On Chinese computer screens, there is room for only one religion: that of the economy, which we persist in calling “socialism.” This is why, if rebellion grows, no mention of any rival cults, even the most harmless, will be tolerated.

網絡關鍵文字和諧總局

—BUREAU OF KEYWORD HARMONY

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.

Karl MARX

Is the Chinese bureaucracy at risk of losing its “mandate of Heaven,” as almost happened to the Manchurian dynasty with the Taiping Rebellion of 1850? The bureaucracy unrelentingly concentrates on “harmonizing” tyranny, while unrest only deepens. An

unprecedented exodus has disrupted rural life. Society has become the arena of sporadic unrest leading to increasingly violent confrontations with police. A corrupt and discredited ruling class no longer guarantees the population access to resources as basic as drinking water and breathable air. Without venturing to compare two very different historical periods, China's population appears to be sinking once again into "complete distress," to borrow from Jacques Reclus's description of the Taiping Rebellion.

The spectacular comeback of religion, with a multitude of flourishing Taoist, Buddhist, Catholic, and even evangelical cults, reflects that distress. The most striking sign of the distraught state of religious conscience came with the rise of the Falungong sect in the early 1990s, which nine years later claimed 80 million converts. Victims of merciless repression today, the sect's members have either gone underground or languish in forced labor camps.

In our interview with him, Pan Shinian explained the religious revival underway in contemporary Chinese society: "One might say that religion represents a need for change. It can develop into a threat to the communists. Communism itself was experienced as a sort of religion." Indeed, the revival of religious morality partially eclipses the materialist values formerly championed by the regime. The pressures and infernal pace of modern life have led many city dwellers to seek spiritual solace.

In light of the popular infatuation with the Falungong's conservative ideology, it is not hard to imagine the impact of an emancipatory, egalitarian movement triggered by an economic slowdown. The ferocity with which the regime invariably represses any protest movement that is even remotely organized and collective gives an indication of the specter that haunts the leaders' worst nightmares. After crushing the Falungong sect, in 2011, the regime turned its fury on the Catholics, whom they suspected of actions transgressing authorized limits. As far back as the scheming Jesuit missionaries of the 18th century and the Taiping's subversive Christian syncretism a century later, the rulers have traditionally perceived Christianity as a threat. The regime tolerates Buddhism and Taoism—along with an officially sanctioned fraction of the Catholic clergy—as long as

they keep within institutional bounds. The regime likewise tolerates American evangelical sects, provided they enter into *joint ventures* with the Party, which secure extra income for certain Party dignitaries while ensuring control over the activities of these charlatans of the good word.

The State has less trouble imposing control over Buddhism, whose clergy is rigidly hierarchical and submissive to the regime—with the exception of the separatist-inclined Tibetan school. So long as the monks don't get mixed up in protests, as in other lands, the regime is lenient and lets them meekly wend their way on the “noble eightfold path.” This non-theist religion appeals to many young Chinese today, especially those in the educated middle class, and the regime allows their temples and other places of worship to multiply. According to a 2005 estimate, there are more than 200,000 monks.

The Communist Party's ideological contortions in shifting from the “Little Red Book” to stock market speculation have blurred its doctrine and opened the door to all kinds of heresies and refutations. Now that the cult of personality, the mystique of Marxist-Leninism, and the rituals of Party allegiance have become obsolete, indeed, totally kitsch, the Party is not unwilling to hand over these exercises in submission to a docile clergy, in place in China for two thousand years.

The case is somewhat different for the more deeply rooted Taoism, whose values of equality and disobedience are profoundly anchored in the mindset of ordinary Chinese. The individualist tendencies professed by this most philosophical of religions, inseparable from China's history, are for the present visible primarily in the frenzied quest for personal success. Yet the ravages wreaked on Chinese society by “double-digit” prosperity could very well revive the traditionally rebellious spirit of the Taoists and turn it against the arrogance of the rich.

APPENDIX

I. IN THE PETITIONERS' WORDS

Excerpt from the soundtrack of Pétition: la Cour des Plaignants (Petition: The Court of the Plaintiffs, 2009), a film by Zhao Liang produced by INA, France's national audiovisual institute, in 2010.

FIRST PETITIONER: "We are human beings, we want respect. Without political democracy we cannot live. Filing complaints is useless. You need a law degree to get anywhere with the Petitions Office. We are harassed, beaten up, arrested, and imprisoned. We're even sent to psychiatric hospitals and reeducation camps. They can do whatever they want with us without going through any legal procedures. This country is completely outside the law. The National People's Congress represents the bureaucracy, not the people. It's really a mafia, a new fascism, Chinese fascism, the fascism of China."

SECOND PETITIONER [*reading from a tract he wrote and planned to hand out at the next day's demonstration to protest the death of two petitioners hit by a train when running away from thugs*]: "Compatriots and especially fellow petitioners, the Chinese Communist Party has duped the Chinese people and people the world over with its pretty lies about communism and 'serving the people with all its heart and with all its soul', and it continues to exercise despotic, dictatorial, corrupt power. To stay in power, the rulers are prepared to kill each other. The tyrant Mao Zedong, who didn't hesitate to liquidate leaders of the Party's old guard like Liu Shaoqi and Peng Dehuai, has given flagrant proof of this. The Party, by nature dictatorial and tyrannical, then carried on the carnage within its own ranks. The ruling class subjected the people to even worse oppression and massacres, in some cases, wiping out entire families. For years, indeed decades, the victims of that oppression haven't stopped registering their complaints. Often their anger ends up impairing their health, and some of them become gravely ill. Some die of illness, others of hunger or cold. Some are maimed or even killed by thugs; others just plain disappear. But their complaints are not cleared up in an impartial manner. Across the

country, almost all political and judicial institutions oppress the people and persecute petitioners inhumanly.

Fellow petitioners, filing complaints leads to a dead end. Stop hoping to see your case settled!

Petitioners from Hohhot in Inner Mongolia were crushed by a train while trying to escape from thugs. Two were killed and two wounded. That is a tragedy. *[shouting]* Wake up! Stand up! Fellow petitioners from all over China, stop filing complaints and come protest! Throw off the Communist Party's dictatorship. Establishing democracy is the only way out for petitioners. It's also the only way out for China.

Wake up! Stand up and resist together! Chinese people, unite! Take over democracy! Exercise democracy! Get rid of the dictatorship! Wipe out corruption to save the country, establish a new democratic China, and bring happiness to the people.

Forward! Forward! Forward!"

[Xiao Yuan, the author of the leaflet, was secretly arrested by the police shortly before the silent march. He and another petitioner, Mr. Liu, spent a month in prison, where they were severely beaten.]

II. DRAGON'S DELIGHT

Transcript of the soundtrack of an animated video ridiculing televised "news." TV hosts Uncle Dragon and Little Turtle alternate careful, measured words with uninhibited tirades against the abuses of the bureaucratic class. Naturally, the video was immediately censored, but it is still available with English subtitles at <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/03/video-dragon%E2%80%99s-take-on-the-two-sessions-translated/>

The program begins with "The Internationale" in Chinese. On the screen first red flags appear, and then three watches, a sequence deriving from an untranslatable pun on two same-sounding phrases, the "three representations" movement (sange daibiao)²⁴ and "three [people] wearing watches" (sange dai biao). The name of the program, Long yan da yue, literally means "The face of the Dragon [the emperor] radiates joy."

DRAGON: Good evening. Welcome to our program, *Dragon's Delight*. I am the program's host, Dragon.

TURTLE: I am your co-host, Little Turtle.

D: Today, March 14th, 2011, the Fourth Session of the 11th People's Congress and the Fourth Session of the 11th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), commonly known as "the Two Sessions," opened solemnly. This was a truly harmonious...

T: We interrupt our program to announce breaking news: at 12:58 a.m. on 10 March 2011, Yingjiang County in Yunnan Province experienced an earthquake that measured 5.8 on the Richter scale. It has already caused more than 20 deaths and left more than 200

²⁴ A slogan launched by Jiang Zemin summing up the Party's three responsibilities: "represent the advanced productive forces; represent modern Chinese culture; and represent the fundamental interests of the greatest majority of the people."

people injured. Currently the rescue operations are basically completed and the rebuilding efforts are going forward in an orderly manner.

D: As I was saying, on the occasion of this truly harmonious event, the Two Sessions, representatives from all provinces, autonomous regions, directly governed cities, and special administrative regions, who come from all walks of life, gathered together as a body to embellish upon the quality of people's lives and to manufacture a harmonious society...

T: I interrupt our program once again for more breaking news: at 1:46 p.m. on March 11, Japan experienced a 9.0 magnitude earthquake. The epicenter was located 130 kilometers off the coast, across from the port of Sendai. The earthquake set off a tsunami, flooding the region and causing large-scale fires and leakage from a nuclear power plant. A number of nations, including our own, sent out tsunami warnings. Currently, rescue operations are underway, while the number of dead and injured continues to rise.

D: *[whispering]*: Geez, Little Turtle, how come I haven't heard about these repeated disasters?

T: *[whispering]*: Uncle Dragon, maybe you don't read the papers.

D: *[whispering]*: Oh, yes I do. I read *The 50 Cent Morning Post*²⁵. The headline was "Two Sessions working to build a harmonious society."

T: *[whispering]*: Even though there has been a series of disasters, the headlines in the newspapers are only about the Two Sessions. The radio and television stations have all filled their prime time with reports about the Two Sessions. *[sigh]* It's hard to tell which disaster is worse, the earthquakes or the reporting.

²⁵ Refers to the amount that Internet commentators, known as honkers, are allegedly paid by the regime for showering it with praise.

D: *[whispering, sigh]*: Just forget about it. What's the use of complaining? Best to focus on what's productive. *[resuming a serious tone of voice]* Anyway, the entire staff of the Dragon's Delight program wishes the earthquake survivors the best of luck. We hope that you get better soon and that you can rebuild your homes and communities quickly.

Every year we hear outrageous comments and this time we had a sumptuous feast, with truly groundbreaking comments. Ma Weihua, President and CEO of China Merchants Bank, expressed his opinion that "Inflation in the housing market is simply a problem related to monetary policy. The reason is that ordinary people have too much money in their hands." *[aside]* Too much money, my ass! Everything has gone up: fuel, grain, oil, salt and even public toilets. The only thing that hasn't gone up is our wages. Mr. Ma, you're the Chairman of a bank. With the money you have, you could spread it like a carpet to cover the entire Forbidden City. Don't the high housing prices just mean that you get to charge higher interest rates? This money comes from ordinary people's blood and sweat. Do you think I'd pawn my great uncle's coffin just so you'd be able to eat delicacies? Do you think you can eat them? I hope you choke and die!

Another comment drew our attention, the theory of the "uselessness of academic achievement." Wang Ping, 11th CPPCC representative, made the statement that "We should not encourage children from rural areas to attend college, because once they do, they don't return to the countryside. Employment pressures in the cities are already severe. Rural kids who are crammed into the cities can never be happy.

T: *[screaming]*: But what the fuck do you care whether we go to college or not? As if everyone who went to college found work, you twat! I bet your family has lived in cities for at least ten generations! I bet they lived in cities since the time of Peking man! So you are saying that people in rural areas should stay stuck in their villages for generations? We should go back to the feudal era where power was inherited? Don't you understand the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater"? Don't you get it? Don't you get it? By your logic, how do you explain the saying that once your stomach is full, you will start to think about other desires"? Are you saying that we should just stop eating,

because once we are not hungry anymore, we get lustful? What kind of crappy logic is that?

D: *[whispering]*: Little Turtle, settle down! Settle down! Be careful of your image!

T: My image, my ass! Sorry, Uncle Dragon, my bad. I shouldn't have interrupted you.

D: Ahem, not to worry... Just take it easy! Let's take a look at the proposal concerning animal protection. Representative Jing Yidan proposed creating a "Law preventing cruelty to animals" and called on the People's Congress to act swiftly to ban the cruel practice of extracting bile from live bears. For a long time, the media, NGOs, and the public have opposed the extraction of bile from live bears. The proposal immediately caused strong opposition on the part of Guizhentang, a company specializing in this type of extraction. Despite challenges from all sides, the company is thinking of ways to secure financing and get listed on the stock market so that it can continue torturing bears. Furthermore, the company brazenly claimed that "Those who oppose us oppose the State." The founder of the company, Qiu Shuhua, also said, "Our bears are very healthy and can reproduce. Their conditions are as comfortable as in kindergarten. They live more comfortably even than the founder of the company. Extracting their bile causes them no harm whatsoever." *[suddenly very vehement]* Balls! If it's so comfortable, why don't you go live there then? Get into their cage with your whole family! You should put your husband, your son in there! I bet you don't even give them anesthesia when you extract the bile. You tie them to the bars of their cage! Not being able to control one's eating or excretion is very comfortable! Get listed on the stock market, my ass! You should put your office in a cage! And get listed right from your cage! That would be really comfortable!

T: Hey, Uncle Dragon, why are you shouting like that? You stole all my lines!

D: My apologies, I couldn't help myself. Now let's turn our attention to the representatives who behaved outstandingly during the Two Sessions. 82 year-old Shen

Jilan, elected as a representative in 1954 to the first session of the congress, served up until the 11th session in 2008. She served continuously for nearly sixty years. She is the only representative to have participated in all of the sessions from the first to the eleventh. When asked about the secret to being a consecutive attendant, she proudly replied, “Being a representative means obeying the Party. Me, I never cast a dissenting vote, because we shouldn’t make trouble for the country.” Little Turtle, your turn...

T: Uncle Dragon, so you’re done shouting? I’ll go ahead then: “Never dissent”? My ass! What do you mean, “don’t make trouble for the country”? Would you die if you cast a dissenting vote? Would the economy collapse? Would it cause inflation? You supported everything, right? You supported the “anti-rightist campaign”! Then you supported the rehabilitation of the “rightists”! You supported the Great Leap Forward and then the “household responsibility” system! Do you know what taking a stand means, you, a people’s representative? My ass! You don’t represent anything at all! The State invites your participation so you can go raise your hand, vote “yes,” and that’s all. You look pretty raising your hand, eh? It would be simpler to show a picture with everyone’s hands raised, huh? At least that way there would be less CO₂ emissions; that would be more environmentally friendly!

D: Stop! OK, that’s enough. Actually, representatives and committee members like Shen Jilan are not rare. Some are often absent. Some never review the legislative proposals. Others review them but never inquire about popular opinion. They just sit around on the toilet and decide proposals on their own to make people’s balls ache, so much so that you wonder if you should laugh or cry about it. Netizens call this phony bunch the “soy sauce representatives” because they only attend the sessions to get soy sauce and a free meal.

T: To put it simply, the job of these representatives should be to reflect the ideas and suggestions of ordinary people and to participate in discussing policies to implement. But I ask myself what’s the use of choosing these “soy sauce representatives?” Many representatives have for long enjoyed the high life, buying BMWs and expensive clothing, indulging in fancy food. Their lifestyle is further and further removed from the

lives of the common people. It makes us question whether they truly represent us. Have they ever waited in line for days and nights to buy a train ticket to return home for the Spring Festival? Have they ever taken a bus so crowded that their feet didn't even touch the floor? Have they ever had their homes forcibly demolished? Have they ever had members of their families beaten up by the cops? By what right do they represent us?

D: You're exactly right. The process for electing representatives and committee members poses a serious problem, since the elites never understand the true thoughts of people at the grassroots level. Hey, Little Turtle, how come you didn't shout this time?

T: I'm tired of shouting. We're here indignant while they're sleeping soundly at their meeting. It's pointless to yell.

D: Hold on a second. Compared with all those "soy sauce representatives" who are only there to fill their seats, there are some much more thought-provoking grassroots resolutions online. Netizen Ergou (dog #2) proposes that the standard for personal income tax should be decided like this: personal income tax is levied only on those with monthly incomes that exceed the average local price of a square meter of real estate." His microblog received an incredible response by Netizens. Within eight days, it was reposted more than 17,000 times. Although a joke, it reflected the inner thoughts of the common people. Salaries are too low, the cost of living is too high. They toil for a few bucks and yet are subjected to an array of taxes. Real estate prices continue to climb, so that poor people can't afford to buy a home.

T: The singer Chuanzi wrote a song called "Complete Happiness." He sings, "Where is happiness at 40,000 yuan a square meter? I work every day to earn my living. I spend my money very carefully. But to find this happiness would take me three centuries. I just can't afford it." Looking back at 2010, the cost of living has increased rapidly in China. And the Chinese people are still broke. Magnificent GDP figures continue to soar. But the poor have to show a radiant smile to pretend they're happy. Today [*resuming a serious tone of voice*], in an auspicious and cheerful atmosphere, the Two Sessions came

to a successful conclusion. Actually, in a period of a few days, they came nowhere near solving all the problems. Housing prices are still spectacularly high. Money is still hard to make, and taxes still must be paid. As for the administration's accomplishments, there are no more than before.

T [*shouting*]: Taxes should be paid by Zhifubao [Chinese PayPal] and payments confirmed only after we see what the administration has achieved. We'd base our rating on our mood. And if our expectations weren't met, we'd demand a refund. Our fucking officials would be obliged to follow us like dogs, saying "Give me a good rating, darling. Elect me, darling. I promise you I'll serve the people, darling! I've done a good job, darling! You know I have, darling!"

D: What a great idea!

T: Really? The problem now is that shop owners couldn't care less if you give them a good rating! First you keep on swiping a fucking platinum credit card that you paid an arm and a leg for, only to discover that the shop owner opened an online account for you. A direct goddamn transfer! Then you complain to Taobao [Chinese eBay]! In fact, you'd given them a good rating by default. And they all have a goddamn "5-star rating"!

D: Are you tired, Little Turtle?

T: Oh, I am.

D: Go home and make yourself a dish of noodles.

T: Alright.

D: Good. That's all for today's broadcast. Thanks for watching and see you next week.

The broadcast closes on the familiar tune of a Chinese standard, Zoujin xinshidai (Let's Enter a New Era), but with the words changed to Lianghui bianzao weilai (The Two Sessions falsify the future).

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And this Documentary

Pétition: la Cour des Plaignants (Petition: The Court of the Plaintiffs, 2009), *a film by Zhao Liang*, INA Video editions, 2010.

N.B.: Just before going to press, we learned that the list of “words to be banned on the Chinese Internet” was a hoax—a *cyber hoax*, stemming from the facetious irreverence of some opponent, who might not even have bothered to be Chinese. The “Bureau of Keyword Harmony” certainly does exist, but under another secret name, or simply a number. The shadowy command center for the surveillance and control of the Chinese Internet depends on the State Bureau of Internet Information created in May 2011, during an overhaul of the propaganda and censorship departments of the Chinese State.

Although this list is fictitious, as are the opinions of the “Bureau of Keyword Harmony,” they nevertheless remain perfectly plausible. And if the Chinese cybercops are not its actual authors, this counterfeit copy nonetheless discloses their point of view and that of their masters, as the knock-off Rolex *made in China* gives the same time as a parvenu’s real Swiss Rolex. This is a good time to remember that in this world of cheap imitations the real is but one moment in the false.

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